

THE SAD SWEET SLEEP OF THANATOPSIS JONES

by

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FADE IN

EXT. SPACE.

In the black silence of Space a Rock tumbles.

EXT. JONES HOUSE. NIGHT.

A suburban house. Snow covered yard. A Christmas wreath on the door.

EXT. SPACE.

The Rock tumbles towards a distant Earth. The silence is broken by two female voices arguing ad lib resolving into...

THANATOPSIS (V.O.)

This means alot to me.

MARIA (V.O.)

Oh, Thanatopsis, don't be such a geek.

EXT. JONES HOUSE. BACKYARD. NIGHT.

Three people sitting around a fire-pit. THANATOPSIS, 16, pale and lovely, wearing a red elf's hat, stands apart. MARIA, dark-haired, fiery, and older, snuggles against her boyfriend, JEFFERY, who is trying to toast marshmallows on straightened coat hangars for all three.

THANATOPSIS

Geek? Me?

MARIA

Or whatever your kind is called these days.

THANATOPSIS

All I'm asking is that you tell me if I've got these last lines right.

MARIA

You're the biggest nuisance a sister has ever had to put up with! I wish you were dead!

JEFFERY

Maria!

MARIA

I won't lie. I would be very happy if she wasn't such a bother.

JEFFERY

See what you've made me do. I'll
get some more marshmallows.

He gets up and heads toward the house.

MARIA

Let's go all the way! Bring out
some grahams and Hershey bars.
They're on top the fridge!

THANATOPSIS

Jeffery's quiet tonight.

MARIA

Well, he's just got his degree and
a job at NASA so his mind's half
way to Pluto Fa-la la-la-la la-la
la-la.

Thanatopsis holds out a Big Book.

THANATOPSIS

Please----

Maria takes the Book but pulls Thanatopsis close.

MARIA

Okay. But then you get the hell
outta here! And I mean outta here!

EXT. SPACE.

As the Rock approaches Earth it begins to heat.

THANATOPSIS (V.O.)

Deal. I'll go inside and be all to
myself.

MARIA (V.O.)

Alright. Go ahead.

EXT. JONES HOUSE. BACKYARD. NIGHT.

Thanatopsis stands ready to recite. She clears her throat.
Opens her mouth---

MARIA

So why do you memorize so much
stuff?

THANATOPSIS

Suppose I go blind. Or deaf. Or both. Or get imprisoned. And I'm all alone. So even if I'm alone I'm never alone.

MARIA

You think about these things?
You're not a geek. You're insane.

THANATOPSIS

And you? If the TV broke you'd be brain-dead---!

MARIA

Okay. Shut up and recite.

THANATOPSIS

Page thirty-seven: "Go forth under the open sky and list/To nature's teachings, while from all around Earth and her waters..."

EXT. SPACE.

The Rock whistles white-hot through the atmosphere.

THANATOPSIS (V.O.)

"...and the depths of air/comes a still voice...."

EXT. JONES HOUSE. BACKYARD. NIGHT.

Thanatopsis sits. Maria closes the Book.

MARIA

So how much of this stuff you got up there?

THANATOPSIS

231 poems, half the Books of the Bible, all of Aesop's Fables and...

Jeffery comes out of the house.

JEFFERY

Oh look--! A shooting star....

As they stand and look skyward: a whoosh, a blinding flash, and an explosion.

EXT. JONES HOUSE. BACKYARD. NIGHT. -- CONTINUOUS

Clouds of smoke and dust swirl in the aftermath of the impact.

Out of this massive confusion crawls a figure.

EXT. JONES HOUSE. BACKYARD. NIGHT. -- LATER

Jeffery consoles a crying Maria, her clothes smoldering. MARY JONES, her Mother, stands in disbelief alternately looking at the sky and the smoldering crater. FIREFIGHTERS in the last stage of their work. Maria bolts toward the crater.

JEFFERY

Maria! No--!

She goes into the impact area, digging through the rubble to get the Book, wiping it clean of ashes.

EXT. JONES HOUSE. DRIVEWAY. NIGHT.

An Ambulance pulls away and down the street. JOE JONES, the Father, Jeffery, and an INSURANCE AGENT examines smoldering Rock. We know the Agent from the reflective "State Farm" logo on the back of his coat.

JOE

Is this the meteor?

JEFFERY

Meteorite.

JOE

What?

JEFFERY

It's a meteor in space but a meteorite when it hits the earth.

INSURANCE AGENT

The boy's right---

JOE

"Hits the earth!?" This thing smashed into my daughter! Does my policy cover it?

INSURANCE AGENT

(flipping through papers)
Now let's see. What kind is it?

The Agent examines the Rock with a Big Magnifying Glass.

INSURANCE AGENT (CONT'D)

Stony? Iron? or Stony Iron?

Ah--iron.

Jeffery now examines the Rock

JEFFERY

I'll confirm that. I've just received my Masters in Physics, Mr. Jones.

INSURANCE AGENT

Well, if its an Iron meteorite then I'm very sorry.

JOE

What?

Agent examines a page of the Policy with the Glass.

INSURANCE AGENT

See for yourself.

Joe peers through the Glass. Emits a low whistle.

EXT. CITY STREET. NIGHT.

The Ambulance speeds to its destination.

INT/EXT. CABIN.NIGHT.

A couple of aging hippies, hereafter known as HE & SHE, living in a unabomber-style nest supported and surrounded by every conceivable protest sign including a "Just Stop Everything" sign made from a pilfered Stop Sign. They wear "Save the Seals" and "Save the Whales" Tee's. He is blogging and finishing some fine weed while She monitors a scanner over a fresh cup of coffee.

VOICE ON SCANNER

"231 McGovern Circle...girl struck on the head by an Identified Falling Object...lapsing into coma..."

SHE

A situation has suddenly arisen!

HE

Don't you mean "evolved"?

SHE

Oh yes-yes! Sorry---

HE

Quick! To the Goremobile!

They quickly exchange the semi-secret Secular Humanist Gesture and spring into action revealing "I Care" Tees. They burst outside. Toss a jumble of signs into their huge green SUV plastered with "Save the Planet, Inc." signs.

SHE

How far is the hospital?

HE

Ten miles.

Consulting her handy "Carbon Footprint Indulgences Calculator".

SHE

We must plant 3 trees, recycle 4 dozen cans and write threatening e-mails to 6 Republicans.

HE

Right! Make a note of it.

SHE

Noted!

He guns the engine and they are OFF in a cloud of smoke.

EXT. HOSPITAL. NIGHT.

Glowing blue letters proclaim a grim institutional block of brick and glass to be the "Greater Duluth Memorial Hospital for the Incredibly Ill".

A gentle sprinkling of snow starts to fall.

INT. HOSPITAL. EMERGENCY ROOM. NIGHT.

A NURSE lazily arranges scalpels. An ORDERLY sanitizes. Some DOCTORS lallygag exchanging golf grips. A closed-circuit TV hangs in a corner. A regular TV, golf in progress, in another. ON THE CLOSED-CIRCUIT TV an Ambulance screeches to a stop. The crew falls out, opens the door and pulls out a gurney.

The Nurse springs into action, breaking up the golf lesson. ON THE CLOSED-CIRCUIT the gurney down, the crew rush towards

the doors. The gurney and crew crash the Emergency Room. Instant, chaotic, and precisely professional action.

EXT. SKY. NIGHT.

A shooting star streaks through the sky.

Advanced is a symphony of sounds: a heavy mechanical breathing overlaid with a myriad of electronic blips, whirrs, dings, and pings, with assorted gurglings and glugs and something that sounds like a Model T cranking up.

INT. HOSPITAL. ICU. NIGHT.

The source of the sounds is a bewildering array of Life-Sustaining Apparatus connected to Thanatopsis. One thick electrical cord trails away terminating in a huge Plug on the wall decorated with tinsel and a candy cane. A sign above the Plug reads: "WARNING!!! PLUG. DO NOT UN".

A DOCTOR examines a chart. He shakes his head and exits.

INT. HOSPITAL. WAITING ROOM. NIGHT.

Joe gazes out of the window. Mary paces. Maria reads the Book. JOE JUNIOR sits in a corner. A gangly youth of 14 or so, he is almost always listening to something through earplugs. Whether his periodic tremors and spasms are music-induced or a serious medical problem is uncertain.

The Doctor enters, his note-taking clipboard ever-present, his note-taking is copious and almost continuous.

MARY

Is she...? Is she---

DOCTOR

What? Dead?

(shrugs his shoulders)

I've done everything I do. All I can suggest now is that you call in the services of a good chef.

Mary breaks down. Joe pivots from the window.

JOE

Is there nothing that can be done?

DOCTOR

Nothing. Except -- propitiate your deity.

Mary gathers herself, secures a bedpan from beneath one of the sofas, positions herself over it, and hikes up her skirt.

JOE
Mary! I think he means appease God.

MARY
But I have to go.

JOE
Doctor---? Comatose?

DOCTOR
A hefty dose.

MARY
This isn't good.

MARIA
(closing the Book)
It could be worse.

Mary goes to Junior in the corner. Nudges him.

MARY
Junior, your sister is...is---

JOE
Mary....

He hands her a Microphone (of the "Mister" variety).

MARY
I forgot.

She taps on the Microphone. Junior nearly hits the ceiling.

MARY (CONT'D)
Junior, your sister is comatose.

Recovered from the blast, Junior stands very still, quivers, and returns to the corner. Mary rushes at the Doctor.

MARY (CONT'D)
She's dead! She's dead, isn't she?

Joe pulls her away. The Doctor is unperturbed.

DOCTOR
It is my studied and experienced
opinion...why, yes, she's dead.

MARIA
Oh, Thanatopsis! I didn't mean
anything I said---!

INT. HOSPITAL. ICU. NIGHT.

Maria enters, followed by the Doctor and the rest of the
family, Junior quickly settling into a far corner.

MARY
Listen! What's that? She...she's
breathing!

DOCTOR
Well, if you want to get technical
about it. Come here.

The Family, excepting Junior, approach the bed.

DOCTOR (CONT'D)
That is not your daughter.

MARIA
What?

DOCTOR
Or your sister.

MARY
Then who is she?

DOCTOR
You mean what is it? What was
formerly...
(consulting chart)
...Thanatopsis Jones is now merely
an extension of these tubes and
wires pulsations, gurglings,
bubblings...

One of the machines "Pings".

DOCTOR (CONT'D)
---and pings.

MARY
Then if it weren't for the machines
she'd be...she'd be...

DOCTOR
---your daughter again. But dead.

MARIA
But --- she could be...thinking.

DOCTOR
Thinking?!

The machine Pings! again.

MARY
Doctor, her brain could be alive!

The Doctor seems to contemplate this possibility, but...

DOCTOR
Well no not really. LOOK! Look at this! He rips off a long strip of graph paper from one of the machines.

DOCTOR (CONT'D)
You don't have to believe me. This is very expensively obtained BrainWave Data that tells me to tell you that this brain is a complete blank!

He hands the paper to Joe, who studies it.

MARIA
But what about her mind?

MARY
Ahhhh....

DOCTOR
(snatching the paper from Joe)
This indicates a total lack of brain activity! It's scientific! It can't be contradicted! It won't be contradicted.

MARY
Doctor! Oh Doctor, please! Maybe she's...meditating.

JOE
"Meditating?"!
(MORE)

JOE (cont'd)
 (shaking her)
 Jimminy Cricket, Mary. We're not
 Orientals. We're Occidentals.
 Occidentals don't meditate. We
 pray. We go to our knees in the
 privacy of our church or bedroom,
 press our hands together AND PRAY!

MARIA
 I know what her mind's doing. She's
 reciting. She's memorized hundreds
 of poems for times like these.

DOCTOR
 Does this look like poetry to you?
 This costs five-hundred dollars a
 linear inch. Poems are a nickel a
 word. And they lie! This doesn't
 lie! It can't lie! It won't lie! It
 is Truth!

Having uttered the irrefutable, the Doctor subsides.

DOCTOR (CONT'D)
 Only the machines are keeping her
 alive.

MARY
 What are you saying?

DOCTOR
 (exactly as before)
 Only the machines are keeping her
 alive.

MARIA
 What are you implying?

INT. HOSPITAL. RECORDING STUDIO. NIGHT.

Earphoned, the Doctor reads from a page of yellow copy.

DOCTOR
 "Only the machines are keeping her
 alive."

INT. HOSPITAL. ICU. NIGHT.

Joe gathers Mary and Maria. He uses the Microphone as an
 Interviewer.

JOE

Doctor, are you suggesting that we should turn the machines off?

DOCTOR

I'm only telling you the truth. Now if you will excuse me, I have live patients to heal. I leave.

And so he does, a bit too heroically.

INT. HOSPITAL. RECORDING STUDIO. NIGHT.

The Doctor removes his earphones, setting down the script.

DOCTOR

Not too strong I hope.

VOICE (O.S.)

That was perfect.

INT. HOSPITAL. ICU. NIGHT.

Joe, Mary, and Marie stare at Thanatopsis.

JOE

We must do something.

MARY

Or. We can do nothing.

JOE

Or something---

MARIA

You mean---?

Maria looks at The Plug. Mary looks at The Plug. Joe leaps at The Plug and grips it as though to Pull It.

MARY

No!

MARIA

She's too young! She might still come out of it in time to get a date for New Year's Eve.

MARY

Yes! And she could be...could be...
(singing)
"Somewhere over the Rainbow..."

JOE

Mary! Get a hold of yourself! We're not in Kansas anymore.

MARY

But we never were. This is Minnesota.

JOE

Don't you think Thanatopsis would have wanted it this way? You heard what the Doctor said...

INT. HOSPITAL. RECORDING STUDIO. NIGHT.

A finger presses a "Play" button.

INT. HOSPITAL. BUSY HALL. NIGHT.

The busy Hall comes to a stop at the recorded voice of the Doctor.

DOCTOR'S VOICE

"Only the machines are keeping her alive."

INT. HOSPITAL. ICU. NIGHT.

MARY

(covering her ears)

Oh no! NO!

A NURSE, of uncertain gender, between a Mime and a Geisha, enters rolling a machine which she attaches and activates.

It resembles an old-time gas pump register. As soon as it is activated it DINGS! and displays a dollar sum of \$10,000. It will continue to tally and goes where Thanatopsis goes.

A commotion in the Hall and as the Nurse exits, a gaggle and tangle of arms clutching microphones and cameras attempts to surge in but Joe manages to shut and lock the door.

JOE

Who would have thought it?

MARIA

Who are they?

JOE

Three-fourths of the cable news networks.

Mary pulls back the curtain and looks out of the window:

INSERT:

The hospital lawn is covered with satellite trucks including that of ESPN. Cables, and interns everywhere. Klieg Lights illuminate ANCHORS earnestly anchoring.

MARY

Better make that all of them.

The new machine DINGS! \$12,000.

JOE

That caps it. We have a decision to make. And at the rate hospital costs are rising...

DING! \$13,500.

JOE (CONT'D)

...and the arrival of the news networks we must decide: does Thanatopsis remain on the machines or do we...

Joe grips The Plug. Mary looks at The Plug. Maria looks at The Plug. Junior scrolls through song titles.

JOE (CONT'D)

---Pull The Plug.

MARIA

Daddy wait! Last week in Philosophy class I was tested on a problem exactly like this.

JOE

How did you solve it?

MARIA

I---

JOE

Be honest, Maria. This is a hospital. Did you pass or fail? Did he live or die?

MARIA

I unplugged. He died. I passed. But daddy! This is my chance to

(MORE)

MARIA (cont'd)
 take the test again! This time I
 want to fail! Don't Pull The
 Plug---!

DING! \$20,000.

MARIA (CONT'D)
 It was only a test. It all seems so
 "..far away..."

MARY
 (nearly singing)
 "---stood an old rugged cross..."

Banging on the Hall Door.

VOICE (O.S.)
 In the name of 24 hour a day 365
 day a year forever and ever
 Hallelujah cable network
 news...Open this Door!

DING! \$25,000.

MARY
 "...for the dear Lamb of God left
 this home far away...."

JOE
 For Christ sake will you be quiet!

MARY
 Alright. But only for He who is
 Him.

Banging at the Door.

JOE
 GO AWAY!

VOICE (O.S.)
 But we want to interview you. Each
 of you.

JOE
 We don't care!

VOICE (O.S.)
 What?

MARY
We don't care!!

VOICE (O.S.)
This could lead to appearances on
Letterman and The View...

JOE
Screw Letterman!

MARY
Poop on The View!

Pause. Murmuring from outside the door.

VOICE (O.S.)
Really?

JOE
YES!

Another Pause.

VOICE (O.S.)
Com'on --- Really?

JOE
Yes --- Really.

VOICE (O.S.)
....Okay....

After listening at the door for a moment, Joe opens it a crack and peeks out. Satisfied, he closes the door. Joe approaches The Plug.

MARY
Joe. Darling. You can't be thinking
seriously of...of doing --- It.

JOE
(craftily)
Listen, Mary, I could contemplate
"it" all I want but...but to
actually do The Deed, well, I'd
need...need a Court Order. Yes, a
Court Order! And where would I get
a Court Order at this time of the
night?

MARY
Give me your handkerchief.

Mary uses his handkerchief to cover The Plug.

MARY (CONT'D)

There.

JOE

Look -- this has been hard on everyone. Why don't you get some coffee and a carbonated beverage.

MARIA

(using the microphone)

Junior, it was a question in philosophy class. It didn't have anything to do with Thanatopsis. She didn't ask to be hit on the head by a meteor. At least not that I'm aware of.

Mary uses the microphone.

MARY

Would you like something to drink?

Junior stands. Looks around.

JUNIOR

Yeeeeessssss---!

EXT. HOSPITAL. LAWN. NIGHT.

The kliegs go off one by one. Anchors in puzzlement. Satellite dishes fold up. Trucks depart. Night returns. Crickets. A grubby ORDERLY, with sack and nail-stick, cleans up the huge mess.

INT. HOSPITAL. VENDING HALL. NIGHT.

A Hall of vending machines. Trash cans and a naked light bulb give it the look and feel of an alley. A padlocked steel door at the end of the Hall is marked "NO EXIT". Below that "Happy Holidays" in strung-out cut-out letters.

Junior has already settled on his haunches sucking on a Mountain Dew between the machines.

Two Ominous Figures appear and block the Hall. Mary and Maria discover them and are taken aback.

MARY

Are you from one of the 24-hour cable news networks?

HE
No.

SHE
...we're not.

MARY
Then who are you?

MARIA
And what do you want?

The figures are revealed to be He and She.

HE
Fear not. We're Secular Humanists.

SHE
And we're here to help you.

BOTH
Whether you want it or not!

He slaps the can out of Maria's hand.

HE
That carbonated beverage will kill
you.

MARIA
What?

HE
My great-grandfather drank
carbonated beverages!

SHE
He died.

HE
My grandfather drank carbonated
beverages!

SHE
He died.

HE
My father drank....

But He breaks down. She consoles. He bounces back.
Pretending to be Black they begin a Caucasoid-rap beat--

HE (CONT'D)
 Secular Humanist is what we are.

SHE
 We're white

HE
 And so bright

SHE
 And tintinnabular.
 (patronizing)
 "Like the ringing of bells."

HE
 We tend to be shrilly

SHE
 But never are silly

HE
 We're just Regular Secular
 Hu-oo-manists.

A pause, as though for applause or otherwise approval.

MARY
 Tell us, please, what should we do?

That's all they need. They launch.

HE
 All life is sacred.

SHE
 We cry for misfits who've carved up
 their parents and chopped them to
 bits. "Have mercy!"

HE
 She quivers. "Don't kill him!"

SHE
 He sniffs.

HE
 We're just Regular Secular
 Hu-oo-manists.

MARY
 Oh thank you! I see it all now.
 What it is we should do...

MARIA

You've given us direction. And hope. Thanatopsis will come out of it yet.

MARY

It's the right thing to do.

MARIA

Yes! Thanatopsis is like...like an unborn child awaiting her moment of awareness, of birth, of re-birth!

He and She recoil in horror.

HE

Don't talk to us of fetuses

SHE

We'd rather save the cetuses

HE

Or baby seals or minnows in a stream!

SHE

And if you bring up morals

HE

We'll be running out of portals

SHE

Because no one's fully human 'till they're six or seven-teen!

Attention shifts to Junior twitching and jerking on his haunches, Mountain Dew squirting out of his nose.

MARIA

If we can hold on till next week she'll be seventeen---!

MARY

Maria, hush! I feel they speak the truth.

MARIA

I don't understand...

MARY

It's not about understanding. It's about feeling, isn't it?

She and He pin black awareness ribbons on Mary and Maria.

HE

You may object to us or our message

SHE

But surely you can't object to a simple piece of ribbon, can you?

MARIA

Well---

SHE

We have never eaten food that's fried.

HE

Contrary thoughts we can't abide.

BOTH

We're completely L.L. Beanified!

HE

We're just Regular

SHE

Secular

BOTH

Hu-oo-man-issssssts. . . .

MARY

Yes-yes! I see it, I feel it all clearly now. I'm converted. I believe!

SHE

Sip our Holy Spring Water.

HE

Eat this no-fat, cholesterol-free soy wafer.

MARIA

Mother! No! Don't do it!

SHE

Too late. She's one of us now.

MARY

(stonily)

I hate George Bush.

He and She give the Secular Humanist Gesture to Mary.

HE
You know what must be done.

MARY
"I do".

SHE
Then do it.

MARIA
Noooooooo!!!

Maria rushes to her mother but is intercepted.

HE & SHE
(a chant 60's style)
Just Do it. Just Do it. Just Do it.
Just do it.

INT. HOSPITAL. ICU. NIGHT.

Joe rubs his hands together in anticipation.

JOE
There now. It's time to take
action. And I'm going to do this
Democratically. Everyone who wants
what used to be my daughter to
remain on these machines raise your
hand.

He surveys the room.

JOE (CONT'D)

Now. All those who want to turn the machines mercifully off,
say "Aye".

He waits a moment.

JOE (CONT'D)
"Aye!"

He whips the handkerchief off of The Plug and ceremoniously
grips The Plug and with a mighty tug, pulls. But it doesn't
budge. He tries again with the same result.

JOE (CONT'D)
 How can this be? She was always so
 docile. So willing to go along.
 (at her face)
 Thanatopsis! This is for our...
 (looks heavenward)
 This is for your own good.

A great tug but falls over on his back. Snaps his fingers.

JOE (CONT'D)
 A Court Order! I was right! That's
 what I need. A Court Order!

INT. HOSPITAL. ICU HALL. NIGHT.

The Hall is empty except for a well-dressed bearded MAN
 typing on his laptop.

Joe bustles out of ICU. Surveys before running to the
 Stairs.

INT. HOSPITAL. STAIRWAY. NIGHT.

Joe, on a mission now, descends several flights.

INT. HOSPITAL PARKING GARAGE. NIGHT.

As befits the middle of the night, there are but a few cars
 as Joe makes a beeline for a Restroom.

INT. HOSPITAL. PARKING GARAGE. RESTROOM. NIGHT.

Joe bursts in. A WAITING ROOM CHAMELEON (cousin to the
 Lounge Lizard) is the only other occupant. He is making
 himself up.

JOE
 Ah! There it is!

On the wall, between prophylactic vending machines, is a
 similar machine, only it dispenses "Court Orders 5¢" Joe
 digs through his pockets.

JOE (CONT'D)
 Damn! Hey, buddy, you got change
 fora quarter?

W.R. CHAMELEON
 Yeah sure...Here you go.

Joe hurriedly deposits a nickel, turns the crank, and out drops a nifty rolled and black-ribboned Court Order.

But wait! If one's good, 2's better.

JOE

In case there's an appeal.

Joe nervously laughs as he leaves. The Chameleon finishes eye-lining then sprays his throat...

W.R. CHAMELEON

"Like a bridge over troubled...."

INT. HOSPITAL. PARKING GARAGE. NIGHT.

As Joe emerges triumphant, clutching Court Orders, Mary exits the Ladies Room determined and ready, bending a coat hanger. They stop. Stare at each other. Joint realization and unity.

MARY

She's really not viable.

JOE

It's best for her.

MARY

It's what she would have wanted.

JOE

We're doing this for her.

Their minds meet. Then their bodies.

EXT. HOSPITAL. ROOF. DAWN.

As Maria enjoys the dawn, Junior twitches on the parapet giving way to thrashings and yelps. His batteries are depleted. Maria has extras in her purse which are as water to a desert wanderer to Junior. He subsides into quivering.

INT. HOSPITAL. EMERGENCY ROOM. NIGHT.

Things have returned to boredom. One Doctor putting. One Doctor polishing his balls. He is distracted and then riveted by the regular TV and rushes to turn the volume up.

DOCTOR

Hey! This is it!

PLAYBACK --- HOSPITAL. ICU. NIGHT.

An Indian ACTOR DOCTOR adjusts a heart monitor on a comatose PATIENT as an American Indian ACTRESS NURSE adjusts the drip on feeding tubes.

ACTOR DOCTOR

Ooo, this is not good. Not good at all. I despair having to tell the sad news. How will I do it?

INT. HOSPITAL. ICU HALL. DAWN.

Joe and Mary, Court Order and Coat Hanger poised for action, approach the door of the ICU.

From inside the room: DING! They grasp each other's hands.

EXT. HOSPITAL. ROOF. DAWN.

Maria runs her finger along the flatline of Thanatopsis' Brain-Wave Data.

MARIA (V.O.)

Could this be a poem? Could dear sweet Thanatopsis be...
(reading from the Book)
"...wandering lonely as a cloud
that floats on high over vales and hills..."?

She removes her black ribbon, throws it to the ground, and steps on it. She dials her cellphone.

MARIA (CONT'D)

Jeffery? I need your help.

INT. HOSPITAL. ICU. DAWN.

Joe opens the curtains and raises the shade revealing the eastern sky in all its splendor. Just to be on the safe side he hands Mary one of the Court Orders, which they hold out toward Thanatopsis. DING! Together they Pull The Plug.

The Sounds begin to gradually drop off and choke, like a cartoon car konking out. The last is the heart monitor which bravely keeps on. It finally flatlines. But no! A blip. Two. Three. But alas -- the flatline prevails. Silence. DING! DONG....

They let The Plug fall to the floor.

INT. HOSPITAL. ICU HALL. DAY.

Joe and Mary exit the ICU. Pause. Then flee.

The Bearded Man looks up from his laptop. As Joe and Mary disappear around the corner, the Nurse appears and goes into the ICU.

INT. HOSPITAL. ICU. DAY.

Immediately upon entering, the Nurse senses trouble: The Plug! She rushes to it, trying to re-insert it but can't.

She spies the spent Court Orders on the floor. The Nurse checks the heart: nothing. Pulse: nothing. Finally, the Nurse lifts Thanatopsis' arm and releases it. It flops down. Again, with the same result. One last time, trying to stiffen the arm before letting it go. To no avail. The match is over.

She covers the body and leaves.

DONG!

INT. HOSPITAL. MORGUE. DAY.

Still, silent, cold, and nearly filled to capacity.

The doors burst open, the slightly-tipsy ORDERLY pushes another Body on a gurney in. After some difficulty parallel-parking the gurney, he takes a drink from a hip flask. Unfortunately it is empty. He finds a bottle which he has hidden beneath the sheets of one of the other Bodies.

ORDERLY

Thanks for keeping it cold for me.

Each of the Bodies has its own DING! machine, only now it DONGS! and at longer intervals. Some of the tallies are astronomical, way into 7 figures. He makes himself room on Thanatopsis' gurney.

ORDERLY (CONT'D)

Well! I hear you nearly made it to your birthday. Too bad. Hey! You know what today is?

When there is no response, he exposes her face.

ORDERLY (CONT'D)

Today is almost my birthday. Who would have thought it? Me. Born. Well, that just goes to show ya.

Finishes the bottle. Retrieves another.

INT. HOSPITAL. GRAND CENTRAL HALL. NIGHT.

The Hall is empty until the Nurse comes through, stopping to watch the ubiquitous TV up on the wall.

PLAYBACK --- HOSPITAL. DOCTOR'S OFFICE. NIGHT.

An anxious FAMILY is assembled around the Doctor's immense horseshoe-shaped desk. Huge portraits of Indira Gandhi and Abraham Lincoln on the wall behind the Doctor.

The Family - a Father, Mother, teen daughter, and a pair of identically dressed but completely dissimilar Boys.

ACTOR DOCTOR

Your daughter died at about 7:47
this evening.

ACTRESS MARY

But she breathes!

ACTRESS MARIA

She blinks!

ACTOR DOCTOR

Simply assisted reactions methinks.

ACTOR JOE

What can we do?

The Doctor produces a larger-than-life electrically-correct model of A Receptacle into which a large Plug is inserted.

ACTOR DOCTOR

Let me demonstrate----

The demonstration produces multiple "oooo's" and "ahhh's" at each extraction and insertion.

INT. HOSPITAL. MORGUE. NIGHT.

The Orderly is now expansive.

ORDERLY

Yeah, they pulled The Plug on me
too once. But I showed 'em!

(laughs)

I went from comatose to
unconscious. Then to impassive.

(MORE)

ORDERLY (cont'd)

Then oblivious. At that point, I
went back to work. Then from
oblivious to ap-athetic. And now?
Ha! I'm just pathetic.

He pulls a Paper Party Whistle out of his pocket, the kind
that unrolls and squeaks. He blows it. It quickly rolls
back. He tries again but can't sustain it.

ORDERLY (CONT'D)

"Happy Birthday to me..." I just can't seem to keep
it...out.

(demonstrates)

Listen: can you keep a secret? It's the coffee. It's the
damned coffee. They put somethin' in it -- ah! Enough of me.
You look like you could use some cheerin' up.

He sticks the whistle in her mouth and covers her up.

ORDERLY (CONT'D)

Yeah, it's the coffee....

He staggers out.

EXT. HOSPITAL. ROOF. DAY.

Junior crouches against an air-conditioner unit. He's either
into some acid rock or having a gran mal.

INT. HOSPITAL. WAITING ROOM. DAY.

The Bearded Man sits at the opposite end of the room from
Joe, Mary, and Maria.

MARIA

You can't have done it!

JOE

We did. We have. Its been done!

MARIA

But why?

MARY

Because it had to.

JOE

It had to be done.

MARY

And so it was.

JOE

Done. Well done.

Frustrated, Maria storms to a corner.

MARIA

You sound like those Manhattan
Lumberjacks!

JOE

What?

Maria glances down at the Bearded Man's laptop and sees that he has typed her last utterance. She looks again but he is playing a violent video game.

MARY

They were Secular Humanists. And
good ones too.

JOE

Maria, listen: Your sister's life
just wasn't viable any longer.

MARIA

Viable?!

Maria sticks her head out into the Hall. She disappears for a moment, returning with the Orderly in tow, with a mop.

ORDERLY

Hay---!

MARIA

"Viable"? How old is he? 53-37?
Married?

ORDERLY

No.

MARIA

Pets?

ORDERLY

Three gerbils.

MARIA

Ambitions?

ORDERLY
To move up to bedpans.

MARIA
Is this a viable life? So we just
ought to Pull The Plug on him too?

Orderly shakes himself away.

ORDERLY
Don't think it hasn't been tried!
But I'm alive!
(laughs fiendishly)
"I'm Alive!"

VOICE ON P.A.
Clean-up in detox Cubicle 3-A.

ORDERLY
(comically)
Oy! If you call this living.
(seriously, to Maria)
Do you call this living?

Orderly drags himself out, mop in tow.

JOE
Darling, don't you see that...

MARIA
---where is she?!

MARY
I suppose the place dead people go.

INT. HOSPITAL. MORGUE. DAY.

Junior sticks his head in. He sees his breath. The cold, the dark, the morbidity, appeal to him.

JUNIOR
Kewl....

He makes a circuit, opens the door to leave. The whistle sounds, muffled. He stops, not certain if he heard anything, surveys the room. Nothing. The whistle sounds again. He lifts his earpiece. The whistle sounds and he notices a bulge under a sheet. He slowly approaches and lifts the sheet. It is Thanatopsis. The whistle is fully extended. Junior is drawn closer and closer to the phenomenon. The whistle snaps closed.

INT. HOSPITAL. ADMINISTRATOR'S OFFICE. DAY.

A gray, faceless ADMMINISTRATOR collates pages from an immense stack as Joe and Mary sign them. Marie reads a Life Magazine.

A gaggle of people stand watching TV. The scene is of a Family standing around the patient on life-support.

ADMINISTRATOR

Sign here. And here. NO! ...Here...and here. And here.

This continues as Junior rushes into the Office. He hurriedly whispers into Maria's ear. She stops him from going to the parents.

MARIA

(signaling to him)

No! Later. Come on.

And they quick-step out.

INT. HOSPITAL. COLORFUL HALL. DAY.

Maria leads the way with Junior, unsure where she is going. Before he can stop her, she throws open the double doors of a Children's Ward where a CLOWN, in frighteningly unfunny make-up, is doing pratfalls for an audience of impassive wheelchair-bound children.

INT. HOSPITAL. MORGUE. DAY.

Maria studies Thanatopsis' immobile face.

MARIA

Are you sure?

Junior nods "yes". Maria gently presses on Thanatopsis' chest and the whistle extends slowly in response.

MARIA (CONT'D)

But can she do it on her own?

Pause. They step back. Junior removes his earpiece. After another moment of waiting, the whistle sounds and unrolls. Maria springs into action.

MARIA (CONT'D)

Help me!

And they pivot Thanatopsis out of line and wheel her out.

INT. HOSPITAL. ADMINISTRATOR'S OFFICE. DAY.

The Administrator points out the options at the end of a long, long page.

ADMINISTRATOR
Cremation or Interment?

Puzzled looks from Joe and Mary.

ADMINISTRATOR (CONT'D)
We pride ourselves on being a
full-service Hospital.

After a moment Joe and Mary respond together.

JOE
Cremation...

MARY
Interment.

They smile.

ADMINISTRATOR
Cremation is cheaper. But then
there's the Rapture.

Blank looks.

ADMINISTRATOR (CONT'D)
Are you religious?

No reaction.

ADMINISTRATOR (CONT'D)
Do you believe in anything?

MARY
Recycling.

JOE
Global Warming.

ADMINISTRATOR
I recommend interment. It's
organic.

MARY

But wouldn't it take up valuable space?

JOE

And coffins are made of wood. Wood that could be used to feed and clothe the poor.

MARY

---and promote world peace.

ADMINISTRATOR

That leaves cremation.

JOE & MARY

Okay. Do it.

ADMINISTRATOR

Sign here. And here. And here....

INT. HOSPITAL. REGULAR HALL. DAY.

Maria and Junior whizz past pushing the gurney with Thanatopsis.

INT. HOSPITAL. CAFETERIA. DAY.

The Doctor operates on a human-shaped glob of green jello, triumphantly extracting a Cherry, which he eats.

A Group eating off of trays stand watching TV as Thanatopsis' gurney bursts in.

MARIA

She's alive! She was dead. But now she's alive.

DOCTOR

No-no. That's not the way it works. First you're alive. Then you're dead.

A Server on the foodline bursts into laughter.

MARIA

Our parents pulled The Plug on her.

DOCTOR

Ooohh, well then...

MARIA
---and she whistled.

DOCTOR
Corpses don't whistle. They sit up.
They gurgle sometimes. But they
don't whistle...

Thanatopsis whistles giving it a full unroll and snap-back.

MARIA
You see?!

The Doctor hastily scribbles notes.

DOCTOR
It's unheard of.

MARIA
Are you saying it's impossible?

DOCTOR
I've never heard of it. And I don't
intend hearing of it!

She whistles again.

MARIA
There! You heard that?

Doctor examines Thanatopsis closely.

DOCTOR
HMMMMM....

MARIA
It's a miracle.

DOCTOR
It seems to be Czech-o-slo-vak-ian.
(pontificating)
I don't know why. I don't know how.
Yet she is. Alive. But. Still deep
in a coma barely at the beginning
of an extremely long sentence.

"Ding-Dong!"

DOCTOR (CONT'D)
 (patting Maria on the
 head)

My dear girl. I am a Doctor of
 Medicine and yet the Nature of Life
 is more of a Mystery to me than
 ever it was. Sign here please.
 Maria signs.

DOCTOR (CONT'D)
 ...and here...and here...and here.
 Oh! And --- there.

The Doctor parades out to applause.

INT. HOSPITAL. CAFETERIA HALL. DAY.

The Doctor walks down the Hall to the Elevators. Out of an
 Elevator walks the Bearded Man. The Doctor slips him papers
 before boarding the Elevator.

DOCTOR
 It's completely out of hand.

BEARDED MAN
 Good!

Thanatopsis is wheeled out of the Cafeteria and into the
 Hall by the Orderly, accompanied by the Nurse. Maria and
 Junior hard on their heels

MARIA
 Where are you taking her?

ORDERLY
 I may be barely viable...

MARIA
 ---look, I'm sorry I...

ORDERLY
 (whispering to Maria)
 ---but I understand.

The Nurse elbows Orderly in the ribs and he pushes the
 Gurney into another Elevator shutting out Maria and Junior.

INT. HOSPITAL. ELEVATOR. DAY.

The Orderly studies the Nurse taking Thanatopsis' pulse. He
 is disdainful of her pink awareness ribbon. She becomes
 aware of this. He has an idea. He pricks his finger,

squeezing droplets on a piece of white ribbon which he proudly pins to his shirt.

ORDERLY
Measels-rights activist.

The Elevator stops and dings...as does Thanatopsis.

INT. HOSPITAL. SICK ROOM. NIGHT.

Thanatopsis lies motionless, the whistle still in her mouth.

The curtains are open showing a star-studded sky. "Ding!"

EXT. HOSPITAL. PARKING LOT. NIGHT.

Maria and Junior walk under the night sky.

A pick-up truck drives by. Stops. Backs up. It is Jeffery.

JEFFERY
Maria! What is it?

MARIA
Jeffery! It's Thanatopsis. She's been unplugged.

JEFFERY
Oh, I'm so sorry.

MARIA
But she lives! She's refused to die. And now I'm afraid.

JEFFERY
Afraid of what?

MARIA
That they're going to try to kill her again.

JEFFERY
Who?

MARIA
Everybody. Except us.

EXT. HOSPITAL. PARKING LOT. NIGHT.

Maria, Junior, and Jeffery walk toward the Hospital. A Van is rocking.

MARIA

That's our van!

They carefully approach. Jeffery throws open the door. Mary and Joe are going at it. Junior turns aside and vomits.

JOE

Maria--!

MARY

Oh, darling, we're just...just---

JOE

---making a replacement for your sister.

MARIA

But she's still alive!

JOE

Alive? Alive! We'll see about that! In just a minute---

Joe pulls the door shut and the Van resumes its rocking.

MARIA

They're lying.

JEFFERY

Maria!

MARIA

He was wearing a condom.

Junior vomits again.

INT. HOSPITAL. SICK ROOM. NIGHT.

Maria, Jeffery, and Junior stand around the bed.

JEFFERY

There must be a way to communicate with her.

Junior puts his earpiece on Thanatopsis. Maria speaks into the microphone.

MARIA

Hello? Thanatopsis? Can. You. Hear. Me? This is your sister. Maria....

But nothing. Junior retrieves his equipment and retires to a corner. Thanatopsis whistles.

MARIA (CONT'D)
Thanatopsis! Yes? What is it?

A single blow.

MARIA (CONT'D)
Can...you...hear...me?

Nothing.

JEFFERY
Once for "yes". Twice for "no".

She whistles twice.

MARIA
"No"!

JEFFERY
What can she mean?

MARIA
It's madding!

In bursts the Clown, pushing aside Jeffery and Maria.

CLOWN
Don't crowd her!

MARIA
Who are you?

JEFFERY
And what do you want?

MARIA
And who are you?

The Clown opens the front of his clown costume revealing a black shirt and white collar and an immense Clown Crucifix around his neck.

CLOWN
The hospital Chaplain. To help you.
And current President of the local
chapter of the SS.S. Sillies in
Service. To the Savior.

MARIA
How can you help?

JEFFERY
And how did you know help was
needed?

The Clown clicks on the TV.

CLOWN

It's already a Movie of the Day.

PLAYBACK -- EXT. DARK ALLEY. NIGHT.

Actor Joe meets surreptitiously with a Gang of Robed SUPREME
COURT JUSTICES. The CHIEF wearing a huge Headdress.

ACTOR JOE
Which one of you is the Chief
Justice? Ah --- Here's a large
amount of cash.

CHIEF JUSTICE
Here Court Order.

INT. HOSPITAL. SICK ROOM. NIGHT.

Maria transfixed at the TV until Clown clicks it off.

MARIA
So that's how he did it. But...but
how has it gotten on TV?

CLOWN
Some doctor, I believe.

MARIA
Ah-ha! He was making all those
notes but he was really writing a
screenplay.

CLOWN
It was probably just a treatment.

He punches this up with a squeeze horn blast.

MARIA
What difference does it make? Can
you do anything?

The Clown makes himself at home. Digging through his big orange bag, he gives Maria and Jeffery funny party hats. He studies the whistle.

CLOWN
Where did this come from?

MARIA
I don't know.

CLOWN
It's professional grade. Vintage
Czechoslovakian.

He produces a Big Bible which is hollowed out and from which he removes paper whistles which he distributes sacramentally into their opened mouths.

CLOWN (CONT'D)
Here. Take. Use.

Jeffery, Maria, and even Junior crowd the bed blowing furiously but expressively.

CLOWN (CONT'D)
Please! Please! Step back. If you
will allow me....

He makes a series of seemingly fluent blows. All await an answer.

MARIA
What did you say?

CLOWN
I asked her name. Wait--! She's
answering.

A weak but noticeable response from Thanatopsis.

CLOWN (CONT'D)
She says her name is
Cran-is-to-peze?

MARIA
It's Thanatopsis.

CLOWN
It must be her accent.

MARIA
She has a slight lisp.

CLOWN
That's it.

MARIA
It's a miracle!

CLOWN
Quiet!

He blows a rather complicated question.

CLOWN (CONT'D)
I asked her if she was now or has
she ever been, in fact -- dead.

JEFFERY
Wow....

Thanatopsis answers simply.

MARIA
Well? Her answer?

CLOWN
"Yes".

The Clown, until now merely eccentric, helpful, and enthusiastic, turns driven, possessive, and evil. He blows a question. Thanatopsis answers.

JEFFERY
What did you ask her?

CLOWN
I asked if she is dead now.

JEFFERY
And....?

CLOWN
"Yes".

MARIA
Ask her what it's like.

Clown asks. Thanatopsis answers. We suspect that the Clown is not entirely forthcoming.

CLOWN
White --- and boring. Look, I...

MARIA
I want to talk to her!

Maria blows a flurry. Waits in breathless anticipation. The Clown bursts out laughing.

MARIA (CONT'D)
What's so funny?

CLOWN
(taking Maria's whistle)
You asked her if she would mind if you wore our shoes on your head.

MARIA
Oh....

CLOWN
Why don't you let me handle this.

JEFFERY
Maybe its best---

CLOWN
Yes! Best. For all of us. If you could just...just give me some time with her.

MARIA
Why?

CLOWN
"WHY?!" HOW DARE YOU--? It...its a delicate language. I need to be alone with her.

Thanatopsis whistles.

CLOWN (CONT'D)
Ah, you see. She would like some...some ice cream. Get her some. FOR GOD'S SAKE GET HER SOME ICE CREAM!

MARIA
(grudgingly)
Okay. But only for Him. And we'll take these with us.

Meaning their whistles.

CLOWN

Since she is both alive and dead
she has information. Knowledge. The
world needs. To know.

Reluctantly they leave.

INT. HOSPITAL. SICK ROOM HALL. NIGHT.

Just outside the Sick Room Junior squats, blowing the
whistle.

JEFFERY

This could be cosmically
significant.

Maria slumps against the wall next to Junior.

JEFFERY (CONT'D)

Maria---?

MARIA

Give me a second. There. Help me
up. For a moment everything drained
out of me.

JEFFERY

You've been through a lot.

MARIA

Me!? What about Thanatopsis?

JEFFERY

She's alive. Well, sort of.

JUNIOR

ICE CREAM! ICE CREAM!

INT. HOSPITAL. SICK ROOM. NIGHT.

Back against the door, the Clown drops all pretense.

CLOWN

What puny minds! Here lies before
me an opening into the world on the
other side of death... what a
title! "The Other Side of Death"!
There's so much to ask. Purgatory
and heaven and hell and Who sits at
the left hand and is He going to
come again? And if so -- WHEN?

He gets a grip on himself. Wipes away any drool. Pulls a chair to the bed, digs a notebook from his bag and blows a serious question. Thanatopsis answers at length as he scribbles notes.

CLOWN (CONT'D)
Really? I wouldn't have guessed it
in a thousand years.

He blows a quick question and she answers.

CLOWN (CONT'D)
You're kidding!

He is now in mode: asking, scribbling, asking.

CLOWN (CONT'D)
Okay. Jesus on the right hand. St.
Paul on the left. What? On his
lap?!

INT. HOSPITAL. SNACK BAR. NIGHT.

Maria, Jeffery, and Junior, with ice cream, are drawn to a group watching TV.

PLAYBACK -- INT. HOSPITAL. ICU.

The Supreme Court, with the Chief in headdress, are on hand as Actor Joe is set to Pull The Plug. Actress Maria bursts in.

ACTRESS MARIA
Stop, daddy, STOP!

ACTOR JOE
I...I can't---! My hand's already
moving---

INT. HOSPITAL. SNACK BAR. NIGHT.

A crush at the TV.

TV WATCHER #1
The bastard.

TV WATCHER #2
It's merciful.

TV WATCHER #1
It's murder!

MARIA

Look! I'm Brittany Spears!

PLAYBACK -- INT. HOSPITAL. ICU.

Actor Joe's hand has grasped the Plug as a UNION BOSS crashes in.

UNION BOSS

STOP!

ACTOR JUNIOR

Look! He's stopped!

ACTRESS MARIA

Saved!

ACTRESS MARY

Thanks be to the Deity and/or Deities!

The Boss hands Joe his card.

UNION BOSS

John Hornbeck, President of the Plug Pullers Union Local #1159. You a member?

ACTOR JOE

As a matter of fact---Joe hands him a card.

UNION BOSS

Hmmm, joined yesterday, eh? Have at it.

INT. HOSPITAL. SNACK BAR. NIGHT.

The crowd has grown rowdy and divided.

GROUP A

Pull it!

GROUP 1

Don't!

GROUP A

Pull it!

GROUP 1

Don't!

GROUP A

Pull it!

GROUP 1

Don't---!

PLAYBACK -- IN. HOSPITAL. ICU.

Actor Joe grasps The Plug for a mighty tug---

UNION BOSS

WAIT! 5 o'clock.

He pulls Joe away.

INT. HOSPITAL. SNACK BAR. NIGHT.

Cheers from Group 1 and jeers from Group A.

PLAYBACK -- INT. HOSPITAL. ICU.

Actor Joe wrests loose from the Boss's grip and rips The Plug from the wall. The Boss rips up Joe's card.

UNION BOSS

We know where you live. You'll never Pull another Plug again.

EXT. HOSPITAL. PARKING LOT. NIGHT.

Joe and Mary exit the Van. A DOG runs by and is struck by a passing car. The joy and peace and satisfaction in Mary's face instantly become uncontrollable sobbing.

MARY

That. Poor. Dog---!

JOE

But Thanatopsis is alive.

MARY

How can that be? Maria's just hallucinating from grief.

JOE

We'd better look into this.

They spot He & She exiting the building.

MARY

Let's ask them about it.

INT. HOSPITAL. SICK ROOM. NIGHT.

Thanatopsis whistles up a storm. The Clown paces, leaps in the joy of discovery, all the time documenting it. He stops suddenly.

CLOWN

What? Are you sure of that?

He whistles his question and she answers. He pauses and stands quietly at the import of her answer.

CLOWN (CONT'D)

There aren't 10 Commandments? Only four?

(a low whistle)

Wow... Okay then, which four--?

He asks. No answer.

CLOWN (CONT'D)

Let me rephrase it....

There is still no response. He asks again. Nothing. The whistle drops from her mouth.

EXT. HOSPITAL. SIDE DOOR. NIGHT.

He & She are enjoying the night air until He is distracted. He sniffs at the air. Sniffs deeper.

HE

You smell that?

SHE

(sniffing)

Smoke?

HE

Cigarette smoke.

This galvanizes them. But there is no one in sight.

SHE

Over there!

They rush around the corner - but no one.

HE

Someone... somewhere... is smoking.

SHE
Let's find 'em!

They speed away toward the next corner.

INT. HOSPITAL. SICK ROOM. NIGHT.

The Clown tries to re-insert the whistle into Thanatopsis' mouth with increasing frustration. He tries to hold it in while whistling a question. Her whistle pops out. She moans.

CLOWN
Oh no! NOOOOOO--!

She puts her hand to her face. She is coming OUT OF IT.

CLOWN (CONT'D)
This can't be happening! There's
so much more to know! Was Jesus
really an only begotten son?

The more she comes out of it, the more frenzied he becomes.

THANATOPSIS
What---? What's happening? Where?
Where am I? And who are---?

CLOWN
---was there really a BIG BANG?

THANATOPSIS

What? How should I---?

In a frenzy, the Clown takes off his Big Shoe and hits Thanatopsis. He hits her again. And again. And again.

EXT. HOSPITAL. DUMPSTER PAD. NIGHT.

He & She round another corner out of breath but are rewarded: there is an ELDERLY MAN enjoying a cigarette. He & She, girded, approach. She slaps the cigarette out of his mouth.

HE
You idiot!

SHE
These will kill you!

HE
And everyone around you!

He jerks the Elderly Man out of his chair and punches him in the stomach. As he doubles over a pack of cigarettes falls from his jacket. She deftly kicks them away and grinds them into the ground. They stand over the Elderly Man. He writhes in pain.

SHE

You'll thank us for this one day.

He flips a business card on the Elderly Man.

HE

We can always be reached through our website.

INT. HOSPITAL. GIFT SHOP. NIGHT.

The Patrons and Cashier are focused on the TV.

PLAYBACK --- INT. HOSPITAL. ICU.

An ELECTRICIAN examines The Plug.

ACTOR ELECTRICIAN

She's unplugged alright.

The heart monitor sounds flat-line then there is a blip.

ACTRESS MARY

Wait! Listen!

The blip becomes regular.

ACTRESS MARY (CONT'D)

She lives! She doesn't need the machines!

INT. HOSPITAL. GIFT SHOP. NIGHT.

The Patrons and Cashier break into cheers.

INT. HOSPITAL. SICK ROOM. NIGHT.

The Clown stands at the bedside still holding the Big Shoe. He is spent after the Deed. He tries to put the whistle into her mouth but it does not stay.

CLOWN

This time, dead for good, I fear.

Just before exiting, he stops. He must try one more time. Close to her face he puckers up and "whistles a happy tune".

Nothing.

INT. HOSPITAL. SICK ROOM HALL. NIGHT.

The Clown, frizzy hair hanging at his side, thumping on his one Big Shoe, exits the Sick Room and around the corner just as two MEN IN WHITE SUITS screech into the Hall.

WHITE SUIT #1
Sometimes he pretends he's a priest
and sometimes a clown.

WHITE SUIT #2
How did he get away?

WHITE SUIT #1
He escaped while watching TV.

EXT.HOSPITAL. DUMPSTER PAD. NIGHT.

Joe and Mary approach He & She, standing over the Elderly Man.

JOE
What happened to him?

SHE
Smoking can be hazardous to your
health.

MARY
She's alive. Thanatopsis is alive!

HE
What do you mean by "alive"?

JOE
We're not sure.

HE
You pulled it all the way out, I
hope?

Joe is puzzled by the intimacy of the question.

SHE
The plug.

JOE
Oh yes.

MARY

All the way.

SHE

Sometimes this happens.

HE

Just make sure nobody feeds her.

SHE

Let Mother Nature take her course.

MARY

So its natural?

SHE

The most natural thing in the world.

HE

She won't feel any pain.

SHE

If it's good enough for millions in the Third World it's good enough for your daughter.

JOE

Oh thank you, thank you.

As She escorts Joe and Mary to the door, He notices the Elderly Man's hand has reached the lit cigarette. He grinds the cigarette and the Man's hand into the ground.

INT. HOSPITAL. SICK ROOM. NIGHT.

Joe and Mary enter carefully as the Doctor concludes his examination. A surly MAN in a RED jumpsuit waits in a corner.

MARY

Is she--? Is she---

DOCTOR

Yes she is. And there's no two ways about it this time. Or three. Or four.

MARY

We were told she was..er is...alive.

DOCTOR
Well she's dead now. I stake my
reputation upon it.

JOE
What's this whistle?

DOCTOR
Undoubtedly a sick joke by one of
the minimum-wage staff.

The Doctor tries to pull it out but it is firm. Rather than
make a scene he shrugs it off.

DOCTOR (CONT'D)
Rigor mortis.

He pulls the sheet over the Body as Maria, Jeffery, and
Junior burst in, Junior with the ice cream.

MARIA
Ah-ha! Oh-no! What have you done?
Where's the Clown?

JOE
Clown? This is how we found her.

MARY
You're delusional.

DOCTOR
Here's the trouble right here.

DOCTOR (CONT'D)
(picking up the Big Shoe)
Big Foot.
(he's the only one
amused. To Joe:)
Initial this please.

MARIA
You see, there was a Clown.

The Doctor tags out with a Judge, in robes and holding a Big
Book, who enters.

JUDGE
Is all the family here? Then
please gather 'round and join
hands.

(MORE)

JUDGE (cont'd)

(opens Book)

Dearly beloved. We are gathered here for The Pronunciation. I now pronounce you D E A D.

(closes Book, attaches tag to toe)

You may now cremate the corpse.

(produces a document)

Sign here. And here. Initial there. And there. And there.

The Judge notarizes the Document and presents it to Joe, shakes his hand, and starts out. The REDMAN comes to life and starts to unlock the wheels and push the bed out.

MARIA

Wait! NO!

JUDGE

It's over.

JOE

All over?

JUDGE

All. Over.

As he leaves, the Judge looks down as though he's stepped on something.

MARIA

I don't believe it! I don't believe any of it! Jeffery do something!

The Redman calmly removes a pencil from his pocket.

REDMAN

I've seen this before. I'm going to poke her eyes out with this pencil. I've always found this to be---

Jeffery wields the Big Shoe against the Redman's pencil.

JEFFERY

Oh no you don't!

The Redman deftly pokes Jeffery in the eye.

JEFFERY (CONT'D)

Owww!

The Redman goes about his business, pushing the bed out of the room.

MARIA
Are you okay?

JEFFERY
That really hurt.

Maria ministers to Jeffery whose wound is superficial.

MARIA
Well--! Isn't anyone...?

Junior turns on the TV.

MARY
Junior!

JOE
No. Wait ---

PLAYBACK ---A COMMERCIAL IS JUST ENDING.

PLAYBACK --- INT. HOSPITAL. CONFERENCE ROOM. DAY.

ANNOUNCER (V.O.)
...and now back to your Movie of
the Day, "Don't Die! Die!"

The Actor Doctor, detached and Godlike, addresses the Actor Parents.

ACTOR DOCTOR
Your daughter's vital signs have
ceased. She is in a "persistent
vegetative state". There is
nothing science, religion,
morality, politics, or literature
can do for her now except to put an
end to it.

ACTOR JOE
How?

ACTOR DOCTOR
Withhold nourishment.

ACTRESS MARIA
Starve her!?

ACTRESS MARY

How can we make a decision like that?

ACTOR DOCTOR

Fortunately, you are not alone. That's right. You out there can help out this family in need. Call one of the two numbers you see at the bottom of the screen: 1-800-SHE/EAT or 1-800-SHE/NO/EAT.

INT. HOSPITAL. SICK ROOM. NIGHT.

Maria grabs a water pitcher.

MARIA

NOOOOO!

She tosses the pitcher at the TV shattering it.

JOE

Maria!

MARIA

One of the last things Thanatopsis said to me was that I'd be brain-dead if the TV ever broke. Com'on Jeffery. You too Junior.

JOE

Where are you going?

MARIA

To see if she was right!

Maria, Jeffery, and Junior vacate the room. After a pause Mary picks up the phone.

MARY

What was that number?

INT. HOSPITAL. FORKED HALL. NIGHT.

The Redman lazily pushes Thanatopsis. He approaches a fork in the Hall with cheery signs indicating "Auditorium" to the right and "Crematorium" to the left. He veers left.

INT. HOSPITAL. SICK ROOM HALL. NIGHT.

Jeffery waits for an anxiously pacing Maria. Junior is mesmerized by a sporadic fluorescent light above them.

JEFFERY

What are we going to do?

MARIA

I don't know.

JEFFERY

You were so positive in there.

MARIA

I know.

JEFFERY

You want some advice?

MARIA

I can't let her go. No way. Not now.

JEFFERY

Not ever?

MARIA

Let's save Thanatopsis and find that Clown!

INT. HOSPITAL. CREMATORIUM HALL. NIGHT.

The Redman approaches the end of a long queue of covered bodies. Atop each is a numbered card. He secures a number for Thanatopsis: 37.

INT. HOSPITAL. SICK ROOM HALL. NIGHT.

Maria takes her frustration out on Junior, shaking him from his fixation on the light. Now he stares, eyes crossed, attempting to catch the retinal eye pixels flying around him. He wanders off down the Hall, grasping at them.

MARIA

Junior---! I'm sorry.

JEFFERY

I'll get him.

MARIA

No! Maybe it's a sign. Let's follow.

INT. HOSPITAL. GIFT SHOP. NIGHT.

Joe and Mary are trying on various styles of Black Arm Bands.

She is distracted by a vocal crowd of shoppers at the TV.

PLAYBACK --- TELETHON SET

The Actor Doctor acts as MC for the event, a glitzy Telethon whose logo is a Big Thumb. The Actress Thanatopsis, in bed, is the centerpiece of the set, around which are arranged amphitheater-style the phone Answerers. A professional Announcer reads from copy:

ANNOUNCER

"In ancient Rome it was the difference between life and death. Today it could mean the difference between walking and riding. You couldn't light a lighter, surf, or snap your fingers without it. And if it wasn't opposable we'd still be primordial slime. Your THUMB. Think about it."

ACTOR DOCTOR

Thank you, Ed. Well, the way it looks now -- no dinner for the poor girl --- AND NOW, let's welcome the Broadway Cast of the new musical, "Lazarus!"

INT. HOSPITAL GIFT SHOP. NIGHT.

An oily and obsequious clip-boarded COUNSELOR taps Mary.

MARY

Who are you?

COUNSELOR

(consulting clipboard)
Are you Mary and Joseph Jones?

MARY

We are.

COUNSELOR

I am your Grief 'n Guilt Counselor.

JOE

We can't afford any more help.

COUNSELOR
Oh, this one's on the house.

MARY
Isn't that nice?

Counselor hands Joe and Mary black headbands.

MARY (CONT'D)
But we're getting these.

COUNSELOR
These are much more practical. Like
the --- cremation you've chosen for
your loved one.

Joe and Mary put on the headbands.

COUNSELOR (CONT'D)
Follow me please----

INT. HOSPITAL. FORKED HALL. NIGHT.

Junior, still chasing the retinal pixils, takes the
"Crematorium" turn. An opened bag of some gloppy chocolate
candy in his back pocket leaves a trail of droppings.

EXT. HOSPITAL. DUMPSTER PAD. NIGHT.

A pack of REDMEN smoke and play cards. Some stand warming
themselves around a burning barrel. Several are ministering
to the Elderly Man.

VOICE ON P.A.
"---sixteen. Sixteen---"

One of the card-playing Redmen throws down his hand and
exits into the Hospital.

He & She come round the corner ready for action but the
sight of the congregation brings them to a stop.

ELDERLY MAN
That's them!

The Redmen whip out their pencils. He & She slowly back the
way they came.

HE
Make a note for my Blog: "The
pencil: how much longer can society
(MORE)

HE (cont'd)
 afford unrestricted and
 indiscriminate ownership of this
 household implement of
 destruction?"

SHE
 Oh darling, you're so brave!

INT. HOSPITAL. LOBBY. PHONE BOOTH. NIGHT.

The Clown intently listening on the phone.

CLOWN
 ...yes....YES! The only way back is
 to go all the way 'round.

He bolts out and away letting the receiver dangle.

VOICE ON PHONE
 "...lows expected tonight in the
 lower teens with scattered
 flurries..."

INT. HOSPITAL. CREMATORIUM HALL. NIGHT.

Maria and Jeffery round into the Hall. Jeffery's eye now
 patched with an improvised black armband. He is more or
 less picking up and eating the spilled chocolate glops.

MARIA
 Junior---?

Jeffery grabs Maria by the arm.

JEFFERY
 Look.

MARIA
 Thanatopsis---?

He pulls back the sheet.

MARIA (CONT'D)
 Oh yes, dear sweet Thanatopsis.

JEFFERY
 Owwww!

He has been bitten by Junior who is under the bed.

MARIA

Com'on out of there and help us.

She pulls the bed out of line and snatches up the number.

MARIA (CONT'D)

Thirty-seven! It's her lucky number!

JEFFERY

Whose lucky number is thirty-seven?

MARIA

Don't you see? It's another sign. It must be. It has to be!

JEFFERY

Thirty-seven? Ah-- degrees. Celsius. Normal body temperature. But---

MARIA

--listen Jeffery. You saw what happened.

JEFFERY

Yes. And it was a wondrous thing but she's been pronounced dead.

MARIA

She's not dead! I won't allow it!

Maria pulls her Whistle out of her pocket and blows a furious question. After a moment, Jeffery pulls her away.

JEFFERY

(calmly)

Okay then, what do you propose we do? Wheel her home. Prop her up against the Christmas Tree with some milk and cookies and a note to Santa asking for --- what? She's had it all. Life and death. Beginning and end. Alpha and omega.

MARIA

Jeffery, when you went in for marshmallows I wished her dead!

JEFFERY

That's not true. I was still there.
And that wasn't the first time you
ever said that.

MARIA

But I can't let it be the last! I
can't! I'm not going to give her
up!

Maria puts her face close to Thanatopsis. Then places her
hands on Thanatopsis' head.

MARIA (CONT'D)

You think there's really such a
thing as a Vulcan Mind Meld?

Jeffery is almost embarrassed for her.

JEFFERY

Maria----

MARIA

Of course I know there isn't.
Only---

THANATOPSIS (V.O.)

(whispering)

"...all that tread the globe..."

MARIA

Wait! It's her! Didja hear that!?

JEFFERY

Maria---

MARIA

Shhhh---! She's trying to tell me
something.

Silence. Jeffery tries to urge Maria away from Thanatopsis.

MARIA (CONT'D)

Get off!

(shutting her eyes
tightly)

Shhhh! Listen----

THANATOPSIS (V.O.)

"...all that tread the globe are
but a handful to the tribes that
slumber in its bosom---"

Maria's expression is so convincing Jeffery steps back.

JEFFERY

What is she saying?

MARIA

Um -- "...all that tread something
or other -- in the globe..." Oh
Thanatopsis! You know I'm not good
at this kind of thing! But she's
alive, Jeffery. Alive!

JEFFERY

So what do we do? Where do we go?

Maria points to the "Crematorium" sign with arrow.

MARIA

Well we don't stay here a second
longer! Junior, get below. Jeffery
you push. I'll scout. Let's go!

INT. HOSPITAL. CHAPEL HALL. NIGHT.

Two Men in White Suits come to a screeching stop in front of
the Chapel doors. They part them and peer in. #2 pulls back.

WHITE SUIT #2

I hate mimes.

#1 cracks the Doors for a longer look. The Clown, as a Mime,
though still wearing one Big Shoe, performs for a
congregation of 2: the Nurse, rapt in the front pew, and the
Elderly Man, smoking in the back pew.

WHITE SUIT #1

He's not that crazy, is he?

#1 closes the Doors.

WHITE SUIT #1 (CONT'D)

Watch out.

#2 examines the bottom of his shoe.

WHITE SUIT #2

Ug! Mime droppings.

INT. HOSPITAL. GRIEF LOUNGE. NIGHT.

The Counselor escorts Joe and Mary into a small Lounge.
Several grieving COUPLES occupy tables. The Waiting Room

Chameleon, accompanying himself on a chord organ, sings a medley of "Songs of Death 'n Dying".

An emaciated and pale GOTH WAITRESS serves drinks to Joe and Mary's table.

COUNSELOR

I know you feel as though you
 "don't need no Grief 'n Guilt
 Counseling". The fact that you feel
 this way is one of the symptoms of
 G 'n G Syndrome. The more you deny
 you have it, the worse you got it.

Counselor shakes their hands and slips out.

INT. HOSPITAL. BUSY HALL. NIGHT.

The Clown, still a Mime, clomps through traffic until he hits an invisible wall knocking him to the floor. He quickly recovers though the wall now encloses him. Acting quickly, he rubs his face clean, discards one glove, and tosses away his beret and Big Shoe. The way is now clear.

INT. HOSPITAL. LOCKER ROOM. NIGHT.

The gurney bursts into the empty room. Junior spills out from beneath. A wheelchair in the corner. Piles of multicolored scrubs.

MARIA

A disguise! We've got to disguise her.

JEFFERY

If she's alive don't you think your parents...?

MARIA

---They've already killed her once. I'm not giving them a second chance.

JEFFERY

What about the Clown...

MARIA

---right! He's the only one we can trust.

JEFFERY

Maria, look at this.

They examine Thanatopsis' forehead.

MARIA

Marks---?

JEFFERY

She's been struck on the head and
it's left an impression. Look.

MARIA

"---ACME---"?

JEFFERY

His Big Shoe.

Maria ponders this for only a moment.

MARIA

Quick Junior! Grab those scrubs---

EXT. HOSPITAL. DUMPSTER PAD. NIGHT.

The Clown, now a Mullah, scimitar in gloved hand,
head-toweled, stands atop the dumpster haranguing the
semi-interested Redmen.

CLOWN

Thirty-seven Eunuchs were in a
hole---

VOICE ON P.A.

"Twenty-five---

A Redman crushes out his cigarette and drags himself into
the Hospital.

CLOWN

---twenty-five Eunuchs were in a
hole. Their only contact with the
world outside the hole was a daily
visit from 6 Amazon women who
danced around the opening of the
hole and tossed 6 donuts to the
trapped Eunuchs.

INT. DOCTOR'S OFFICE. NIGHT.

Doctor sits behind a huge empty desk flanked by portraits of
himself, deep in thought directed at a Party Whistle in the
center of his desk. The Whistle is from a bag of them also
on the desk. He picks up the Whistle. He puts it in his
mouth. And blows. He rises to his feet. Tosses the Whistle

into the trash.

DOCTOR

This is an affront to all of
medical science!

He pockets the Bag of Whistles, opens a cabinet of
stethoscopes for a replacement, and strides out.

INT. HOSPITAL. LOCKER ROOM. NIGHT.

Maria puts the finishing touches of rouge to Thanatopsis'
cheeks. She sits in the wheelchair, tied upright with bits
of scrub sleeves, face made up as a clown's and dressed
gaily with fragments of scrubs. The whistle in her mouth
completes the disguise. Jeffery wears a white labcoat.

MARIA

There! Jeffery, you push.

EXT. HOSPITAL. DUMPSTER PAD. NIGHT.

Some of the Redmen are rapt and wearing towels on their
heads.

CLOWN

Then one day a special envoy of
augurs from the Wazir's court
unrolled a rope ladder down the
hole. Attached to the end of the
ladder was a note from the Wazir
which read: "Today was your last
day for donuts. You have 2 choices:
you can remain in the hole, or, you
can climb out. But when you reach
the top, my augurs have orders to
immediately slit open your bellies
and spread your entrails out over
the ground."

The Men in White Suits sneak into the midst of the Redmen.

WHITE SUIT #2

Now!

WHITE SUIT #1

No! Shhh. Wait---

CLOWN

After a week, twelve and a half of
the Eunuchs climbed out whereupon
(MORE)

CLOWN (cont'd)
 they were immediately slit open and
 read by the augurs. The remaining
 twelve and a half drowned like rats
 two weeks later when a freak
 rainstorm flooded the hole.

WHITE SUIT #2
 Now----!

The Redmen erupt into violent in discussion and argument. By
 the time the White Suits have broken free, the Clown has
 gone.

WHITE SUIT #2 (CONT'D)
 Damn!

WHITE SUIT #1
 (grabbing #2)
 What else could they have done?

WHITE SUIT #2
 What?

WHITE SUIT #1
 The Eunuchs---

VOICE ON P.A.
 "Twenty-six through thirty-six!"

INT. HOSPITAL. GRIEF CHAMBER. NIGHT.

The Chameleon finishes the medley to lukewarm applause.

W.R. CHAMELEON
 Thank you---thank you.

He wheels out a TV on a cart and starts a video.

PLAYBACK --- AN INDUSTRIAL FILM

A succession of costumed actors in process shots.

SPACEMAN
 Death --- the final frontier.

ENGINEER
 Death --- the dark at the end of a
 well-lit but incomplete tunnel.

FOOTBALL PLAYER

Sudden Death -- more than just a way of breaking ties.

HANDSOME MAN

Remember me? I'm Duluth's own Rendell Evans and I played Timmy for three episodes of the NBC summer sitcom "6 Boys 4 Girls a Dog and a Green Parakeet". We at the Greater Duluth Memorial Hospital for the Incredibly Ill express our regrets at your loss.

EXT. HOSPITAL. DUMPSTER PAD. NIGHT.

A lone Redman, whom we know as our Redman warms himself at the barrel while White Suit #1 examines the towel the Clown was wearing. White Suit #2 cajoling him to continue the pursuit.

VOICE ON P.A.

"Thirty-seven----"

Redman leaves.

INT. HOSPITAL. AN EMPTY HALL. NIGHT.

The Trio (Maria, Jeffery, and Junior) with Thanatopsis in wheelchair and fully disguised, whiz down the Hall. Up ahead the Doctor strides toward them. The Trio slows to a walk, averting their gazes. It seems to work as the Doctor continues past. The Doctor mouthing words and gesturing grandly. But the Doctor stops.

DOCTOR

Wait a minute. That whistle. That girl!

A pause. The Trio break into a run. The Doctor gives chase.

INT. HOSPITAL. CREMATORIUM HALL. NIGHT.

The Redman finds the Hall empty. At the far end of the Hall a door opens and the HEAD REDMAN, stoker in hand, steps out.

A pause. The Redman turns and runs away.

INT. HOSPITAL. GRIEF LOUNGE. NIGHT.

As the PLAYBACK ends, the Chameleon reprises some "Songs of Death 'n Dying" as the Waitress distributes CD's and Urns.

PLAYBACK --- INDUSTRIAL FILM

The Handsome Man holds up a CD case, simple black with white block lettering: "Songs of Death 'n Dying".

HANDSOME MAN

---sung incomparably by our own
Kevin C. Lockwood. Death --- just
the beginning.

Behind the scenes in a laundry:

DRY CLEANER

Dying -- more than just changing
color.

A phone booth in the desert. ELVIS turns from his call.

ELVIS

Death --- it's not my thang but
it's plenty good enough for you.

He returns to his call. FADE TO BLACK

INT. HOSPITAL. GRIEF LOUNGE. NIGHT.

The Goth Waitress has only a CD for Joe and Mary.

JOE

Wait! Where's our Thanatopsis?

GOTH WAITRESS

Uhhh, only gotta George left.
Nobody's claimed him. You can have
him if you want. It's all just
ashes and dust anyways.

INT. HOSPITAL. FORKED HALL. NIGHT.

Joe and Mary stand at the fork.

The Men in White Suits whiz down the "Auditorium" Hall.

INT. HOSPITAL. ELEVATOR HALL. NIGHT.

The Trio, plus Thanatopsis speed down the Hall towards a bank of elevators. Jeffery pushes as many of the buttons as he can.

JEFFERY

Com'on! Com'on! The elevators are slow but dinging. The Orderly appears.

ORDERLY

Wait! Try this one----

He uses a key from his belt of keys to open a single elevator on the opposite wall.

JEFFERY

Why?

ORDERLY

Do you want explanations or escape?

JEFFERY

(to Maria)

What do we want?

MARIA

There's liquor on your breath.

The single elevator door opens.

ORDERLY

Okay so I just made communion. Are you going?

They pile into the tiny elevator. The door closes just as the Doctor comes screeching up as all the other elevator doors open with multiple dinging.

DOCTOR

Which way did---?

ORDERLY

Up-up-UP!

The Doctor dives into one of the elevators. The Orderly removes the key from the single elevator and ambles away.

INT. HOSPITAL. CREMATORIUM HALL. NIGHT.

Joe and Mary approach the end of the Hall.

INT. HOSPITAL. CREMATORIUM. NIGHT.

The Head Redman, in a red and gold jump suit, sits behind a tiny desk. On the wall behind him many metal doors with center portholes beyond which rages red-hotness. Shelves

display a multitude of Urn sizes and styles. Joe and Mary enter.

MARY
Where's our daughter?

HEAD REDMAN
Didn't you get one of these?

JOE
No.

HEAD REDMAN
Oh. Did you request the Family Pack?

He indicates a cute set of 4 Urns of diminishing size as the Redman bursts in.

REDMAN
Number 37 --- Gone! I've looked almost but not quite everywhere---

MARY
Is that our---

HEAD REDMAN
Thirty-seven...thirty-seven---
(consulting a manifest)
Ah-- Than...Than a---

MARY
That's her! Thanatopsis!

JOE
Gone where?

REDMAN
Just gone. Gurney and all.

INT. HOSPITAL. TINY ELEVATOR. NIGHT.

The Trio and Thanatopsis are crammed into the tiny elevator. Junior still semi-pixilated.

MARIA
Which way?

JEFFERY
Down! Down! Down!

There is only one button and it is labeled "Down-Down-Down!". Maria hits it. There's a jerk. The light dims.

JEFFERY (CONT'D)

I don't feel anything.

MARIA

Are we going up or down?

Jeffery tosses a coin into the air. Matrix-like, it hangs. Junior slowly envelops it in his hand with his pixils.

INT. HOSPITAL. X-RAY HALL. NIGHT.

The Clown/Mullah dashes into the X-Ray Room. The Two Men in White Suits screech up as the huge Iron Door slams shut.

WHITE SUIT #2

Now we've got him.

WHITE SUIT #1

Do we? Do we got him?

WHITE SUIT #2

He's trapped like a Eunuch in a hole.

WHITE SUIT #1

We've got him. But I get him.
(bangs on door)

RUN!

#1 wrestles #2 to the floor as the Clown exits the Room, hiding behind the towel.

INT. HOSPITAL. GRAND CENTRAL HALL. NIGHT.

A place where several Halls all feed into one Space, empty except for a TV on the wall and 2 chairs. The Redman skids into the Space. Which way to go? Joe and Mary bring up the rear.

MARY

It has to be Maria and that boyfriend of hers.

REDMAN

Where would they take her?

JOE

What would they do?

REDMAN
 (offering)
 Redhots?

They refuse.

MARY
 So which way?

Each points down a different Hall.

EXT. HOSPITAL. GARDEN. NIGHT.

The Orderly sits on a bench sipping hot chocolate. Dawn threatens. He looks up. It starts to snow.

INT. HOSPITAL. GRAND CENTRAL HALL. NIGHT.

The Doctor stalks into and out of the Hall.

PLAYBACK --- TELETHON

Back at the Telethon ---

ACTOR DOCTOR
 ...and our new totals are---

Decidedly pop Indian music heralds the new totals on the Big Tote Board.

ACTOR DOCTOR (CONT'D)
 ---and it looks like it's still a
 virtual... dead heat!

INT. HOSPITAL. GRAND CENTRAL HALL. NIGHT.

The Doctor returns, distracted by the TV.

DOCTOR
 That's NOT how I wrote it! What are
 they going to do next? Make it a
 musical?

He rushes off. Almost immediately the Clown, now a perspiring Southern Baptist, towel over his shoulder, strides into the Space. He stops to limp up his already limp Bible. He atomizes more perspiration on his face and armpits then receives Inspiration!

CLOWN
 Yes-Yes-YES!

And dashes off as White Suit #1 enters in pursuit.

WHITE SUIT #1
Wait! I'm not chasing you! I'm
following you!

He dashes off as White Suit #2 enters nursing a bruised
face.

WHITE SUIT #2
---but I AM chasing both of you.
Bastards!

INT. HOSPITAL. TINY ELEVATOR. NIGHT.

Jeffery explores the structure. Junior focuses on the
throbbing light in the ceiling. Maria studies Thanatopsis.

JEFFERY
This probably isn't the time -- but
I've gotten my assignment from
NASA. I'm going to be a payload
specialist for the next planetary
probe.

MARIA
Jeffery! That's wonderful!

JEFFERY
And where is she? Streaking past
the Asteroid Belt?

MARIA
No.
(pats the Book)
I think she's somewhere in here.
(opens the Book and
reads)
"Two roads diverged in a
yellowwood/and sorry I could not
travel both---"

Pause.

JEFFERY
Until today I thought death was
binary.

MARIA
Binary?

JEFFERY

Either-or.

MARIA

Like pregnant you mean?

JEFFERY

Yeah.

MARIA

But it's not?

JEFFERY

I'm not so sure now. Look, if death is like sleep---

MARIA

That's what everybody says.

JEFFERY

Right. And life is like being awake---

MARIA

That sounds right.

JEFFERY

What about the time in-between? I mean, you lay there awake and then at some point you're not. Awake. But there's something connecting them that isn't one or the other. Once I recorded myself going to sleep counting backwards: 100, 99, 98, 97, 96 ---95, 94, 93 that's waking, that's life, but then 92, 91, 90, 87, 13, 94 there it is! That's not waking but its not sleep. 82, 81, 35, 18 that's what's in-between. It doesn't have a name but it's 3 before 2, 18 followed by 67 preceded by 19! That's where I think she is!

The light goes off. Total Darkness. DING! The Door opens into a blinding whiteness.

EXT. HOSPITAL. GARDEN. DAWN.

The eastern sky glows rosy. The Orderly drains to the dregs his cup of hot chocolate. He sets the cup on the bench, gets up, stretching, and walks off.

The cup is full and steaming, including whipped cream.

INT. HOSPITAL. PARTS HALL. DAY.

Jeffery, Maria, and Thanatopsis are in a white Hall. The elevator has closed and disappeared, literally.

MARIA

Junior!

Jeffery feels the wall.

JEFFERY

It was just here!

Maria uses the Mr. Microphone---

MARIA

JUNIOR!

The Hall has only one way out: a Door over which a flashing sign proclaims: "PARTS".

JEFFERY

We've got to go this way.

MARIA

What about Junior?

JEFFERY

He probably doesn't know he's lost.

MARIA

Are we?

EXT. HOSPITAL. PARKING LOT. DAY.

He & She are poised to enter their Goremobile.

HE

My blog can wait There's so much
more we can do here.

INT. HOSPITAL. TINY ELEVATOR. DAY.

Junior clings to the wall, still focused on the light when suddenly the door opens ejecting him into---

INT. HOSPITAL. TV STUDIO. DAY.

---the set of a Sick Room where a rehearsal is in progress with the Actor Family surrounding the bed of Actress

Thanatopsis, all blowing sports whistles.

The DIRECTOR jumps in.

DIRECTOR
Stop-stop-stop! No-no-no!

He rips the Whistle out of the mouth of Actor Joe.

DIRECTOR (CONT'D)
Like this---

He blows and blows and blows furiously for each of the actors.

DIRECTOR (CONT'D)
This isn't first and ten from
mid-field! My god! It's fourth and
goal from the one with time running
out!

He jams the Whistle back into Actor Joe's mouth.

DIRECTOR (CONT'D)
Now blow! Blow like you've never
blown before!

They blow until stopped by a single gunshot.

The Director has fired a pistol into the air breaking one of the spots which flashes and crackles merrily. He throws his headset to the floor.

DIRECTOR (CONT'D)
This. Is. HOPELESS!

The Director storms out.

ACTOR JOE
What are we to do?

ACTRESS MARY
How are we to do it?

ACTRESS MARIA
And who's going to tell us to do
it?

All eyes gravitate to Junior, still spilled onto the floor, headset on, and grasping at the flickering of the shattered spotlight in a manner decidedly directorial.

MONTAGE --- INT. VARIOUS LOCATIONS IN HOSPITAL. DAY

In the Employee's Lounge, a blender furiously blending suddenly stops.

In the Laboratory, a pair of whirling test tubes stop whirling.

In a Dialysis Room, patient after patient's fluids slow to a stop.

He & She eagerly flip breaker switches "off".

INT. HOSPITAL. POOL. DAY.

The Pool Room is empty. The water still. A single light highlights the Clown, as Baptist Preacher, standing at the end of the high diving board. Perspiration runs off of him like a waterfall. White Suit #1 bursts in.

WHITE SUIT #1

DON'T---

The Clown silences him with a grand gesture.

CLOWN

(in a Baptist accent)

TWO MEN --- were cast adrift on a sacred sea filled with fish of a holy order. Desperate, one of the men threw over his beliefs and drank some of the Holy Water and ate a Holy Mackerel. He died. The other man, dehydrated, starved and exposed, expired the next day.

The Clown tosses the towel away, presses his hands prayerfully together and dives perfectly into the water.

After the disturbance subsides with no sign of the Clown, White Suit #1 belly flops in. He too disappears.

As the water calms to glass White Suit #2 rushes in. The Bible and White Suit's shirt pop to the surface. A Hand grasps the Bible and pulls it back beneath the surface.

Silence and calm return.

INT. HOSPITAL. GRAND CENTRAL HALL. DAY.

Simultaneously Joe, Mary, and the Redman arrive from different directions, the Redman slips on a puddle of puke.

REDMAN
No sign of #37 anywhere.

MARY
You mean Thanatopsis---

JOE
---our daughter.

REDMAN
Look, this could cost me my job
--and my back -- if we don't find
'er. You're just in it for a jar of
dust.

MARY
How dare you!

REDMAN
(pulling himself up)
It's true, isn't it?

Pause.

JOE
How dare you characterize our
situation!

MARY
And how dare you judge us! And it's
not a jar, it's an Urn.

JOE
And it's not dust, it's ashes.

Redman wipes the puke off his backside.

REDMAN
Yeah well suit yourselves.

He slips down once more and slides away. The Orderly arrives pushing a squeaky wringer bucket. He sizes up the puke and wrings out his mop.

MARY
Can you imagine---?

JOE
Referring to our daughter as a jar
of dust.

Pause. Orderly slishes the mop and wrings again.

MARY

But --- this is what she would have wanted. Right?

JOE

How can you doubt it? It's self-evident: life starts at birth and ends at death.

The Orderly wrings the mop one last time and snaps open a yellow safety cone: "BE VIGILANT" depicting a stick figure leaping over a puddle.

ORDERLY

No. Life begins at conception and is everlasting. Eternal.

He exits leaving Joe and Mary open-mouthed. But they recover. Mary snickers.

MARY

Bumper-sticker philosopher!

JOE

Racist!

MARY

Republican.

JOE

They're everywhere. Like roaches.

MARY

Shouldn't we be -- somewhere?

Joe plops himself down in one of the chairs.

JOE

We are.

INT. HOSPITAL. INCUBATION WARD. DAY.

The quiet is broken sequentially by babies crying as one after one the incubators shut down then reverses as each of the bodies goes silent.

INT. HOSPITAL. GRAND CENTRAL HALL. DAY.

Joe and Mary seated, the TV above them clicks on.

PLAYBACK --- TELETHON

The Actor Doctor finishing coffee and a donut. Points to a Big Clock which is straight up 12 o'clock.

ACTOR DOCTOR
Time's up! Will it be NO-DINER? Or
DINNER? Glucose? Or no-course?
Feeding tube? or Being rude?
Starvation? Or salvation?

A drum roll as the Tote Board cycles.

ACTOR DOCTOR (CONT'D)
There it is! NO DINNER! The people
have spoke!

And nurses and orderlies remove everything from the sickroom leaving a frail girl on a stripped bed.

INT. HOSPITAL. PARTS HALL. DAY.

Maria, Jeffery, and Thanatopsis have reached the end of the long Hall. A grocery-store-like sliding door opens upon their approach.

JEFFERY
"Parts"? What kind of parts?

Jeffery steps in, followed by Maria pushing Thanatopsis. The Door closes. The "Parts" sign snaps off.

INT. HOSPITAL. PARTS PLACE. DAY.

A darkened museum-like Space. As Maria, Jeffery, and Thanatopsis proceed, signs and displays turn themselves on.

The first of these is the sign 'WELCOME TO PARTS PLACE' accompanied by royalty-free music.

The sign 'EXTERNAL' appears. Inside glass cases are tastefully displayed and labeled fingers, toes, ears, noses, arms, legs, and breasts.

MARIA
It's weird.

JEFFERY
Sure is.

MARIA
I mean, I'm getting really hungry.

As they proceed past the "External" phases out and "INTERNAL" appears.

Arranged in an open refrigerated unit and displayed on individual styrofoam trays are teeth, livers, lungs, hearts, colons, spleens, kidneys, bladders, and stomachs. Behind the display, an animatronic surgeon/butcher busily working.

Maria stares at a liver lying on a bed of Romaine. She snatches it and rips out a bite.

JEFFERY

Maria---!

MARIA

I couldn't help it. I'm starving.

"Internal" fades as up ahead, high up on a wall appears the sign 'ETERNAL", chase lights flashing. The lighting of this sign is accompanied by a Live Orchestra of natural whistlers, penny whistlers, party whistlers, slide whistlers, and sports whistlers whistling a Fanfare. They fade.

About eight feet up in the wall below the sign is a small circular Opening.

MARIA (CONT'D)

Something tells me we've reached our destination.

JEFFERY

We have. But has Thanatopsis?

They look up at the Opening, blackness beyond.

INT. HOSPITAL SICK ROOM. DAY.

A COUPLE, each in an Iron Lung Machine modified so they can hold hands.

IRON LUNG MAN

My little pushkin, I believe---

IRON LUNG WOMAN

Believe what, my dear hornied toad---

IRON LUNG MAN

That no matter what, no matter who, no matter how---

Suddenly their machines shut down. Their joined hands part as their machines sigh their last sighs.

INT. HOSPITAL. ELECTRICAL ROOM. DAY.

He & She have reached the mother lode: a room filled with Breakers of all kinds, one of which She has just pulled.

SHE

If only life was this simple.

HE

One day it will be.

Together they grasp a Giant Switch and pull it. A section of wall slides away revealing a Passageway. They enter.

INT. HOSPITAL. PARTS PLACE. DAY.

Maria and Jeffery stand under the Eternal Opening, Jeffery trying to leap up to reach the Opening, which he finally does, pulling himself up into it.

JEFFERY

Can't see a thing. We'll never get Thanatopsis up. Oh my--! It's closing!

MARIA

Oh, Thanatopsis! I know you're alive. I know you can hear me.

JEFFERY

Hurry---!

MARIA

Remember when you said that even when you were alone you were never alone? I believe you now---

JEFFERY

Maria---!

She tosses the Big Book up to Jeffery.

MARIA

You don't need this. Your sweet mind wanders through meadows and---

She hugs Thanatopsis.

JEFFERY

--it's now or never---!

He pulls her up and into the almost closed Opening.

MARIA

Let's goooooooooooooo---!

JEFFERY

---ooooooooooooooooooooooooooooo!

They disappear into the Blackness. The Opening shuts tight.

Lit only from the glow of the "Eternal" sign, Thanatopsis sits silent and still in the wheelchair.

After a moment voices and footsteps are heard in the distance. It is He & She.

SHE

Well well well. What have we here?
Are you thinking what I'm thinking?

HE

There's no way she's going to make
it on her own.

They examine the Whistle closely.

SHE

This has got to go.

He pulls at it but it doesn't budge.

SHE (CONT'D)

Harder---

No luck so both strive until it pops out.

HE

There!

The Whistle is laid on her lap and they disappear pushing Thanatopsis into the Darkness.

INT. HOSPITAL. FORKED HALL. DAY.

He & She, with Thanatopsis, enter the Forked Hall.

SHE

Wait a minute ---

She goes around the front of Thanatopsis and examines her face closely.

SHE (CONT'D)
Take a look at this---

There are streaks in her make-up made by tears.

SHE (CONT'D)
Quick! Give me your handkerchief.

She eagerly erases all of the streaks.

SHE (CONT'D)
There! No one will ever know.

And they push her into the Crematorium Hall.

INT. HOSPITAL. BASEMENT. DAY.

The elevator dings to a stop. The Doctor emerges. In a far corner of the cavernous space the Bearded Man squats, the laptop on the floor beside him.

BEARDED MAN
It's out of my hands.

DOCTOR
But it's right there.

Bearded Man picks up the laptop which is clicking away.

BEARDED MAN
It's achieved a life all its own.

DOCTOR
UnPlug it!

BEARDED MAN
I have!

The Doctor plunges the laptop into a barrel of water. It struggles and bubbles but finally stops.

DOCTOR
There! That's how its done.

EXT. DRAINAGE DITCH. DAY.

White Suit #1 and Clown, dripping wet, crawl out of a discharge pipe like a couple of nearly drowned pups. Clown recovers first, pulling himself up.

CLOWN

Freedom!

And starts to climb out of the deep ditch. But White Suit has grabbed a hold to his leg.

WHITE SUIT #1

Tell me more! I want to hear more!

Clown angrily shakes him off.

CLOWN

Look! I---

(but changing tack)

Get on your knees. No-no. Stand up!
Face away from me. Lift your left
foot. Raise your hands. Repeat
after me: I Believe In Olio.

WHITE SUIT #1

"I Believe In Olio---"

(turning around)

What?

CLOWN

It's not what you think.

WHITE SUIT #1

Oh. But---

CLOWN

ARE YOU QUESTIONING ME??!!

White Suit turns away.

WHITE SUIT #1

"I BELIEVE IN OLIO! I BELIEVE IN
OLIO!"

CLOWN

"Oh so Holy Olio."

WHITE SUIT #1

"Oh so holy O---

The Clown whacks White Suit across the back of the head with a Big Stick, felling him like a sack of garlic. The Clown admires his feat, tosses the Big Stick to the ground.

CLOWN

I've always wanted to do something
like that.

And clammers laughing up and out of the ditch.

INT. HOSPITAL. TUBE. DAY.

Marie, followed by Jeffery slide down a Tube.

MARIA

--OOooooooooo---!

JEFFERY

--OOOOooooooooo---!

INT. HOSPITAL. CREMATORIUM HALL. DAY.

He and She push Thanatopsis down the Hall towards the Crematorium. The Redman rushes in behind them.

REDMAN

Hey! Where do you think you're going? Step aside. This is my job.

He and She step aside and the Redman continues towards the end of the Hall, He & She following. When nearly there, the Head Redman, manifest in hand, steps out of the Crematorium, the end of the Hall bathed in red.

HEAD REDMAN

Number thirty-seven I presume?

REDMAN

None other!

HEAD REDMAN

(ticking her off)

Excellent.

Head Redman makes way for the Redman to push Thanatopsis into the Crematorium.

HE

Looks like our work is done.

HEAD REDMAN

It must give you an immense feeling of --- triumph.

SHE

Yes it does. It does---

HE

In fact---

The Head Redman turns curtly into the Crematorium, slamming the door in He and She's faces.

He quickly recovers, sniffing the air.

HE (CONT'D)

Do you smell that?

SHE

Smoke---?

HE

No! Coffee.

SHE

Oh my---!

HE

Dispensed in massive quantities by every business in every office in this country! An incredible conspiracy. We have work to do!

EXT. DRAINAGE DITCH. DAY.

White Suit #2 tumbles out of the discharge pipe. He sees #1 lying in the ooze.

WHITE SUIT #2

Oh my God!

He turns #1 over, slapping him on the back until he comes to, spitting mud and slime.

WHITE SUIT #2 (CONT'D)

What happened? Did he get away?

#1 stares blankly into #2's face until he is seized by a Tremendous Certainty. #1 seizes #2 by the shoulders.

WHITE SUIT #1

OLIO!

WHITE SUIT #2

Oli-what?

WHITE SUIT #1

O! OLIO!

#1 rises to his feet, lifting his left leg and facing away from #2 raising his arms heavenward.

WHITE SUIT #1 (CONT'D)

I---! I BELIEVE--! I BELIEVE
IN---! I BELIEVE IN OLIO! OH SO HOLY
O---

#2 whacks #1 across the back of the head. He tumbles to the ground like a sack of grits.

WHITE SUIT #2

It happens to all of us sooner or
later: We are what we become.

#2 then drags #1 back into the discharge pipe and they both disappear.

INT. HOSPITAL. CREMATORIUM. DAY.

The Head Redman moves Thanatopsis into position near one of the iron doors. The other ovens are ablaze giving the room a hellish glow. He removes her toe-tag, carefully cross-checks his paperwork. Satisfied, he opens the door and slides out the tray. He lifts Thanatopsis out of the wheelchair and plops her on the tray. He places the Whistle on her chest.

PLAYBACK --- FINALE

A bare room. Actress Thanatopsis in white lying atop the sheets. A drum beat. Empty Space surrounds the bed. On catwalks above are Doctors, Parents, Politicians, lawyers each able to manipulate some part of Actress Thanatopsis' body by means of strings.

In a full Bollywood Musical the manipulators "dance" Thanatopsis until the Hero arrives.

It is Junior, completely in his element: frenzied dancing, sparkling costumes, loud music in which Thanatopsis is ultimately freed of all ties and returns to her bed which ascends into Glory.

INT. HOSPITAL. FORKED HALL. DAY.

On the TV, endless credits roll over stills from previous scenes. He and She meet Joe and Mary.

HE

Well, it's done.

SHE

Well done by now I would say.

He and She try to suppress snickers.

MARY
What do you mean?

HE
You'll find out.

SHE
Congratulations---

HE
---and condolences.

He and She leave. Counselor arrives.

COUNSELOR
Mr. and Mrs. Jones?

JOE
Yes---?

COUNSELOR
Come with me please.

INT. HOSPITAL. GRIEF LOUNGE. DAY.

As the Chameleon sings one of the "Songs of Death 'n Dying" the Waitress distributes Urns to new sets of Grieving People. Seeing the supply of Urns rapidly diminishing, Joe and Mary are anxious.

JOE
Where's our daughter?

GOTH WAITRESS
Have another drink.

MARY
This is the worse service. We wish
to speak to the manager.

At the song's high point, a chute opens and out slide Maria, then Jeffery, onto the stage floor.

JEFFERY
Wow. So this is the Eternal? I
think I've been here before.

MARIA
Mom! Dad!

JOE

Maria! We apologize. We thought you had done a very naughty thing with your sister.

MARIA

What?

MARY

But we were wrong.

Maria sees the Grieving People with their Urns.

MARIA

(to Jeffery)

We never should have left her! Now we're too late!

JOE

But you're not. There seems to be some sort of hold-up. Waitress!

MARIA

Com'on! There might still be time!

Maria and Jeffery storm out of the Lounge. The Waitress distributes the last of the Urns to a Family, each member getting a suitably-sized Urn.

INT. HOSPITAL. CREMATORIUM. DAY.

The Head Redman is ready to slide Thanatopsis into the Oven. A banging at the door.

DOCTOR (O.S.)

Open up! Open up in the name of Medical Science! What---? ...and in the name of the Writer's Guild!

HEAD REDMAN

It's open.

The Doctor and the Bearded Man enter as the Head Redman dogs the Oven Door. He twists the Big Knob from "OFF" through "SULTRY" to "4-ALARM" to "PYRE".

DOCTOR

Just in time. You getting all of this?

BEARDED MAN
 (taking shorthand)
 Gottit.

A whistling is heard coming from the Oven.

INT. HOSPITAL. CREMATORIUM HALL. DAY.

Maria and Jeffery nearly collapse outside the door to the Crematorium. There is whistling from within.

MARIA
 I hope we're --- do you hear that?!

JEFFERY
 Oh my God--YES!

They rush in.

INT. HOSPITAL CREMATORIUM. DAY.

Before Maria and Jeffery can get their bearings, the Doctor has pulled the bag of Party Whistles out of his pocket and he and the Bearded Man whistle to cover the now fading whistling from the Oven.

The Head Redman twists the Big Knob to "OH MOMMA!".

BEARDED MAN
 A fitting tribute to a fighting
 spirit.

DOCTOR
 Amen---

They toss their Whistles into the trash as they leave. Maria stares into the Oven through the porthole.

MARIA
 Is she---? Is she---?

The timer goes off. Four beeps a la microwave oven.

HEAD REDMAN
 Now she is.

Jeffery consoles Maria.

INT/EXT. HOSPITAL. LOBBY. DAY.

The Jones' Van awaits as Joe signs papers at the Front Desk ("and here and here and here..."). Mary, Junior, and Maria

patiently wait.

The Urn sits in a plastic bedpan sitting on the seat of a wheelchair tended by the Orderly. Joe finishes and the Family pile into the Van. Maria pleading for the Urn and to remain. The Van drives away.

MARIA
(to Orderly)
I thought you understood.

ORDERLY
I did. I do. I will.

Jeffery drives up in his truck. Maria gets in clutching the Urn.

MARIA
She'll always be with me.

INT. GOREMOBILE. DAY.

He and She settle in, He lighting a pipe, She dipping a teabag.

SHE
Are you feeling what I'm feeling?

HE
Satisfaction---?

SHE
A little lower.

HE
Are you proposing that we create...

SHE
---ah-ah!

HE
I mean... Produce--? Erect---?

SHE
Oh darling, you're such an activist.

HE
Manufacture---?

SHE
Too capitalistic.

HE
Well then, shall we generate a
little bundle of embryonic stem
cells?

SHE
I thought you'd never ask!

EXT. HOSPITAL. PARKING LOT. DAY.

The lone Goremobile sits in a far corner of the lot. A bird
sings. It stops. Lightning strikes the car. It explodes.

EXT. COUNTRY ROAD. DAY.

The Clown, now a Man wearing a well-worn and slightly out of
style but neat suit, ambles down a narrow 2-lane road. He
whistles merrily.

He comes across a man, OLIVER, in his front yard hard at a
futile effort to dig out a stump. The Clown stops to watch,
hands atop the rail fence separating them. Oliver gives the
stump a mighty tug but it is stubborn. He sits himself on
the ground wiping his face.

OLIVER
Ain't interested.

He rouses himself and attacks the stump again.

OLIVER (CONT'D)
Go on with ya. I'm in no mood for
preachin' today.

CLOWN
What?

Oliver indicates the Bible sticking out of the Clown's
pocket.

OLIVER
Preachin'---

The Clown removes his coat, drapes it over the fence,
loosens his tie, rolls up his sleeves and attacks the stump.

CLOWN
Well, do'u want this stump out or
dontcha? Com'on!

Oliver joins in and the stump gives way.

OLIVER

Thanks mister.

The Clown rolls down his sleeves. Oliver is pleasantly satisfied and possibly willing to listen to a 'pitch' now.

OLIVER (CONT'D)

Uh ---

The Clown approaches Oliver.

OLIVER (CONT'D)

Water---?

The Clown accepts, drawing a long pull. He hands the bottle back to Oliver who sets it down and takes up his shovel.

The Clown wipes his mouth, staring at Oliver and approaches until face to face.

CLOWN

I was once willing to KILL when the prospect of validating through reason what I had accepted on faith presented itself to me!

Oliver backs slowly away, gripping the shovel ready to wield it if needed.

OLIVER

Uh --- yeah. Me too!

CLOWN

But I'm much better now. Much better. Thanks, friend.

The Clown crosses the fence, taking up his coat and resumes his amble, whistling merrily.

INT. MARIA'S BEDROOM. NIGHT.

Maria on her bed, Big Book on her lap, turning the pages lovingly while eating from several bags of snacks. The Urn on her bedside table. She lifts the Urn.

MARIA

You've lost weight.
(smiles)
Lucky girl.

She replaces the Urn. Closes and puts up The Book. She is impatient.

EXT. JONES HOUSE. BACKYARD. NIGHT.

Maria lights the fire-pit. It blazes quickly. The wood crackling. Maria settles down with a huge bag of marshmallows.

EXT. JONES HOUSE. BACKYARD. NIGHT -- LATER

The fire's burned down to coals, like stars in the sky. Maria gently swirls the stars with a stick. Her cellphone rings.

MARIA

Jeffery! God, I've missed
you---What? Florida? You mean just
drop everything and come to
Florida? Junior too? --- Why not?
WHY NOT!

She throws the stick into the pit making a shower of sparks and a flare-up of the fire.

EXT. CAPE CANAVERAL. NIGHT.

A floodlit Rocket sits poised for blast-off.

EXT. BEACH. NIGHT.

Maria and Jeffery, close together, can see the Rocket in the distance. Junior squats, still listening but watching in anticipation through binoculars. Jeffery checks his watch and turns on a radio.

MARIA

Shouldn't you be there?

JEFFERY

This is where I want to be.

They kiss.

RADIO VOICE

"5-4-3-2-1 ---"

The Rocket rises majestically and fiery.

RADIO VOICE (CONT'D)

"...and we have lift-off of the
first probe to Pluto. Pluto: once
a planet, now demoted to renegade
moon. Nevertheless the destination
(MORE)

RADIO VOICE (CONT'D) (cont'd)
 for this ambitious journey to the
 outer reaches of our solar system
 -- and beyond."

The Rocket streaks upward lighting the entire sky and accelerates almost out of sight. Even Junior is impressed. He stands and removes his earphones.

MARIA
 Jeffery, I'm so proud that you're
 apart of that.

JEFFERY
 In a way you are too.

MARIA
 What do you mean?

JEFFERY
 There's a passenger on board.

Maria is puzzled. Jeffery proud. Maria glimmers.

MARIA
 You mean---?

Jeffery nods.

MARIA (CONT'D)
 Thanatopsis---?! Oh Jeffery!

She embraces and kisses him.

JEFFERY
 I sneaked her ashes aboard.

MARIA
 And now she's ---- out there.

Maria watches the vapor trail dissipate and the small white-hot spot fade. Tears stream down her face.

EXT. BEACH. NIGHT. -- LATER

Jeffery and Maria lie on their backs enjoying the starry night sky. Junior squats watching waves lap the shore.

MARIA
 I know somehow Thanatopsis has
 still got poems in her mind. In her
 soul.

EXT. SPACE.

The Pluto Probe silently tumbles through the blackness.

THANATOPSIS (V.O.)

"When I look at thy heavens, the
work of thy fingers, the moon and
the stars which thou hast
established---"

EXT. BEACH. NIGHT.

Maria and Jeffery embrace.

THANATOPSIS (V.O.)

"---what is man that thou are
mindful of him, and the son of man
that thou dost care for him?"
Maria. Maria!

Maria springs up.

MARIA

What?

JEFFERY

What is it?

MARIA

She called out my name.

JEFFERY

That's not possible.

MARIA

It was like she was standing here.

THANATOPSIS (V.O.)

Maria---?

(O.S.)

Maria? Jeffery, I saw her move!

MARIA

There! Again! Didn't you hear her?!

THANATOPSIS (O.S.)

Maria? Can you hear me? Can you
hear me? Please---

MARIA

YES! I CAN HEAR YOU!

INT. HOSPITAL. SICK ROOM. DAY.

Thanatopsis stands over Maria, who is immobile in bed.
Jeffery gently urges Thanatopsis back into a chair.

THANATOPSIS

Jeffery, I am certain I saw her
move.

EXT. BEACH. NIGHT.

Maria stands knee-deep in the ocean.

MARIA

Wait---! What's happening? Where
has everyone gone? Why am I so
hungry?

INT. HOSPITAL. SICK ROOM. DAY.

Thanatopsis sits sobbing in the chair. Mary enters softly.
Jeffery is pretty much at a loss and quite resigned.

MARY

Thanatopsis, there's someone here
to talk to you. To help you---

THANATOPSIS

I don't need help! It's Maria
who...Oh don't you understand?
Don't you care?

A MAN enters. He is the Doctor, only now goateed and in
tweed.

DOCTOR

Of course we care. That's why we're
here. Come with me, my dear.

THANATOPSIS

Why couldn't we have waited for
Uncle Oliver?

MARY

Dear, you might have noticed that
this hospital doesn't have a bar.

THANATOPSIS

But---

DOCTOR

Come along...

THANATOPSIS

NO! She pulls away from the Doctor.

DOCTOR

As you wish.

He leaves.

EXT. BEACH. NIGHT.

Exhausted, Maria wades onto the shore and collapses.

INT. HOSPITAL. SICK ROOM. DAY.

Jeffery consoles Thanatopsis. Mary looks out of the window. Joe enters. He takes Mary's hand who takes Thanatopsis' who keeps Jeffery's.

JOE

(softly)

The doctors say it can't be much longer.

THANATOPSIS

I can't believe that we're doing this.

JOE

Two years. We've given her two years...

THANATOPSIS

Stop whispering!

MARY

Hush, dear---

THANATOPSIS

Why? She can't hear anything, right? That's what everyone tells us, has told us, keeps telling us---!

EXT. BEACH. NIGHT.

The ocean is close to covering Maria. Her eyes close.

MARIA

So hungry --- so tired.

INT. HOSPITAL. SICK ROOM. NIGHT.

Thanatopsis sleeps against Jeffery's shoulder. Joe and Mary stand over Maria's peaceful face.

JOE

Uncle Charley was always her favorite.

MARY

And he's hurt her the most. And not for the first time.

JOE

But she's never held it against him.

MARY

Brother of mine or not, he's had ample time to drag his sorry carcass here.

JOE

Where do you think he is?

MARY

(bitterly)

Still looking for himself. This year he's probably a guru in Tibet.

EXT. MOUNTAINTOP. DAY.

A SUPPLICANT squats before a Guru. The back of the Suppliant's head blocks our view of the Guru's face.

SUPPLICANT

Keep me in suspense no longer,
Great One! Utter to me the promised
Truth of Truths!

The Suppliant prostrates himself revealing the Guru to be the Clown with a party Whistle in his mouth. He blows and it unrolls and squeaks. He is seized with Insight, blows the Whistle out of his mouth, jumps to his feet and using the Suppliant's back, springs out of the scene. The Suppliant reaches out for the Whistle.

SUPPLICANT (CONT'D)

Oh, thank you, Great One...

The Clown returns and grinds the Whistle into the ground.

INT. HOSPITAL. SICK ROOM. NIGHT.

Thanatopsis sleeps on a cot. Joe and Mary share the chair. A Nurse takes Maria's pulse, which is evidently very faint. Thanatopsis opens her eyes and sits up.

NURSE

I'd gather the family together.
Thanatopsis rouses Joe and Mary.

THANATOPSIS

Get Jeffery.

Joe dashes out of the room.

EXT. BEACH. NIGHT.

The ocean nearly engulfs Maria until she is pulled away from the foam. She opens her eyes to see the Clown, now completely Charley, bending over her.

MARIA

Uncle Charley---!

CHARLEY

Don't speak.

He puts his fingers to her lips.

CHARLEY (CONT'D)

I'm here to take you home.

EXT. BEACH. NIGHT. -- LATER

Charley and Maria warm themselves before a fire. She's wrapped in his guru robes.

MARIA

---so Thanatopsis is not on her way
to Pluto?

CHARLEY

(smiling)

No.

MARIA

She's alive and well and---?

CHARLEY

---somewhere out there very close
to you. Maybe as close as I am to
you right now.

MARIA
And mom and dad? And Jeffery?

CHARLEY
The same.

MARIA
And Junior?

CHARLEY
Who?

MARIA
My brother.

CHARLEY
Maria, you know you don't have a
brother.

MARIA
Thank God....

Standing up, she drops the robes.

MARIA (CONT'D)
So Thanatopsis is right here?

CHARLEY
Or there. Or there.

MARIA
(excitedly, close to
Charley)
I've heard her calling out to me!
Reciting to me---!

CHARLEY
That's a hopeful sign.

MARIA
Of what?

CHARLEY
That I won't...won't have to take
you --- home.

MARIA
So home isn't --- home?

CHARLEY
No.

The full weight and import of her situation presses her down to the sand.

MARIA
How much time?

CHARLEY
Precious little.

MARIA
Isn't it enough that I hear her?

CHARLEY
It should be but it isn't.
(pause)
And I can't help you.

MARIA
Because --- you're not here. Right?

He is gone. The robes are gone. The ocean is gone. The sand is gone.

INT. HOSPITAL. SICK ROOM. NIGHT.

Maria is peaceful. She is surrounded by Joe and Mary, Thanatopsis, and Jeffrey, who holds Maria's hand. We see them from Maria's POV with the door in the background.

After a long moment Charley enters, closes the door and leans back against it, arms crossed. Maria opens her eyes.

MARIA
Are you here?

CHARLEY
You bet.

MARIA
Is it time?

CHARLEY
Time? What is time? I'm here to take you home----

Maria's hand slips from Jeffery's.

INT/EXT. SOMEWHERE. DAY/NIGHT.

Maria and Charley stand shoulder-to-shoulder. Charley takes several steps away without Maria. His steps tap.

MARIA

What's that?

CHARLEY

What?

She points to his feet. He happily discovers the tapping.

CHARLEY (CONT'D)

Com'on!

She joins him. She taps too. They slowly discover a nice simple time-step which they execute in place as we pull slowly away AS CREDITS ROLL until they eventually disappear.

FADE OUT